

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

Number 110 December/January 1992/93

(unwaged 30p) 50p

PIT CLOSURES

UNEMPLOYMENT

WAGE CUTS

SOLIDARITY
PRICE £

Editorial:

Not waving but drowning

... Government moves to solve the crisis 2

Britain's coal crisis:

Stop pit closures

... The energy connections
... out on the streets supporting the miners
... the general strike slogan 5,6,7

Agribusiness:

The hunger trade



... Big business and the food trade 8/9

Cuba:

Bitter nightmare of capitalism

... Speech to the UN by Cuban Foreign Minister Ricardo Alarcon 10

Apartheid:

Racism and the Springboks

... British AAM sabotages the boycott 11

Criminal injustice:

Law and order

... Reform won't end miscarriages of justice 12

Iraq arms scandal:

Iraqgate: arms, lies and profits

... The exposure of how we are governed 16

TIME TO FIGHT BACK

Political success and survival ultimately depend on economics. Having thrown billions into the pockets of foreign exchange speculators, the Tories were forced to accept the inevitable on 16 September. British membership of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) was suspended and the pound allowed to fall. Having told the world a few days earlier that 'there was going to be no devaluation, no realignment', John Major's Tory government lost any credibility it still had. Politically it was now an open target.

By mid-October it was reeling from a storm of protest from every part of the country which forced it to accept a partial review of UK energy policy only days after it had tried to shut down most of the British coal industry. In the first week of November only Liberal Democrat votes, barely disguised threats directed against Tory rebels and further retreats on Maastricht allowed a by-now desperate government to survive. Three votes separated the government from ignominious defeat. By mid-November government lies over its export of military equipment to the Iraqi government before the Gulf war, and its readiness to betray its own intelligence agents to save its own skin, were exposed in the British Iraqgate scandal. Less than a week later the government faced a new outcry over its arrogance and incompetence in publishing a totally misleading and often inaccurate league table of the examination results of English secondary schools. If it was not for the politically bankrupt character of the Labour opposition, no one would believe that this government could survive much longer.

No economic policy

Gone are the days of monetary discipline, balanced budgets, tax cuts and a strong pound. Government economic policy has become whatever it is forced to do to remain in power. There are no longer any principles or any grand designs other than a determination to remain in office.



Chancellor Lamont

The problem for the government is that its economic policies are now seriously affecting the living standards of crucial sections of its voting constituency. Business failures are at the highest level since the recession started with 76 companies collapsing a day. There were 24,219 company insolvencies for the 12 months to the end of September or 2.6 per cent of all actively trading companies. Six million mortgage holders have seen the price of their homes fall since they bought them, and 1.5 million of these have negative equity, the size of their mortgages being greater than the value of their homes. 21 per cent of people who purchased their

Tory government: not waving but drowning



Striking Sheffield social workers set up their own 'cardboard city' to illustrate the effect of cuts. Public Sector cuts are an essential ingredient of the government's attempts to solve the crisis.

homes since 1987 and 41 per cent in Greater London have negative equity. The average deficit per household is £4,400 and £5,500 in Greater London.

Unemployment in October reached 2.87 million, a rate of 10.1 per cent, the highest level since May 1987, an increase of 1.2 million since the recession began. The rate in the South East has reached 11.2 per cent, the third highest in the country. The impact of the crisis on the better off sections of the working class and the middle class is indicated by Bank of England statistics for 1991 for those recently made unemployed (having lost their jobs in the previous six months). 41 per cent of men recently made unemployed (compared to 34 per cent in 1986) are from mortgaged owner-occupied households and 41 per cent have A-level qualifications or above (34 per cent in 1986). 15 per cent had previous professional/intermediate occupations and 53 per cent were skilled workers (compared with 13 per cent and 51 per cent in 1986 respectively). Recent developments will almost certainly have strengthened this trend.

On one day, 19 November, a further 10,000 job cuts were announced. Unemployment is predicted to reach 3.5 million and stabilise on the optimistic assumption of a 2.5 per cent growth of GDP per year from 1994-5 onwards. Official statistics reflect the more than 30 changes the government has made to the way unemployment is defined. The real level based on the original definition is some 1.15 million higher, so that the numbers of unemployed could be well on the way to 5 million even if the predicted growth rates are reached. This will have socially explosive consequences and underlies the government's concern that 'a strategy that brings renewed confidence and a return to economic growth is more essential than ever'.

However, with much of the world in the middle of a deep recession, there is no way that the government's strategy for economic growth can be reconciled with its commitment to the Maastricht treaty and some form of meaningful European economic and political union. Britain's economic decline has gone

too far. This is clear from an examination of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.



Prime Minister John Major

Maastricht and the Autumn Statement

The predominant view of the Tory party on Europe, after the removal of Thatcher, had been expressed by Heseltine in 1989 when he said:

'The conditions which made it possible for Britain to be semi-detached from Europe for so long have vanished for ever. There is no empire to sustain us; we are no longer an industrial superpower; we can no longer pretend that Britain is in any sense an equal partner of the US. There is nowhere for us to go except as part of a European consortium.' (cited in the *Financial Times* 30 October 1992)

However, belonging to the 'European consortium' ultimately imposes certain 'convergence criteria' on those who wish to take part (see 'In the

Behind all the talk of economic recovery and of putting Britain first, is an attack on the living standards of the working class - the well tried, traditional solution that capitalism has always adopted for solving its crisis.

shadow of the Deutschmark', FRFT 108). Article 104c of the Maastricht treaty requires government budget deficits to be no larger than 3 per cent of GDP and the ratio of government debt to GDP not to exceed 60 per cent by 1 January 1994 - at the beginning of the second stage of monetary union. The Autumn Statement shows there is no possibility of Britain meeting the first of these criteria by that date.

The government intends to stick to its target for public expenditure of £244.5bn already set for 1993-4, a real increase of over 4 per cent decided before the election. But it will only be able to do this by cutting the living standards of 5 million public sector workers, imposing a 1.5 per cent limit on wage increases. Over the next three years the new control total for public spending (another change of definition), excluding cyclical expenditure associated with the recession, is planned to grow at about one and half per cent a year, half the rate of growth of the last three years. The government will almost certainly be forced to exceed this as millions of public sector workers resist cuts in their living standards.

The prolonged recession will mean that total government spending (excluding privatisation proceeds) will rise to 44.75 per cent of GDP in 1992-3 and 45.5 per cent in 1993-4, higher than when the Tories first came into office. At the same time the loss of tax revenues as unemployment has increased will push the budget deficit to £37bn in 1992-3 or 6.25 per cent of GDP, and to £45bn in 1993-4 or 7 per cent of GDP. If privatisation proceeds are excluded the budget deficit will reach 8 per cent in 1993-4 and is predicted to climb above £60bn in 1994-5 approaching 10 per cent of GDP. Britain has no chance of meeting the Maastricht targets without massively increasing taxation as well as forcing further wage cuts on the vast majority of workers. Such a programme would not only destroy the Tory party, but would create conditions for a renewal of class struggle.

Hobson's choice

After being forced out of the ERM, the government cut interest rates by 3 percentage points,

including 1 per cent on the day of the Autumn Statement. With the pound now devalued by around 13-15 per cent, together with the tax concessions to industry and the small stimulus to investment contained in the Autumn Statement, the government vainly awaits an economic recovery. In the face of this half-hearted tinkering with an economy on the verge of a slump it is not surprising that many social democratic commentators are now calling for a return to the Keynesian interventionist policies that were so successful during the post-war boom. However the situation facing the British economy today is very different from those 'halcyon' days.

After the second world war Britain was still a major industrial power with a strong manufacturing base. It was a major imperialist power with access to the protected markets of the British Empire and the flow of super-profits from its overseas investments. The world economy was relatively stable under the hegemony of US imperialism. The latter became the international banker for the rest of the capitalist world. Its loans and investments became the driving force behind the post-war boom.

Today the situation is very different. Britain's manufacturing base has been decimated. There are now only 4.4 million employed in manufacturing compared with 8.8 million in 1965. US economic domination has ended. The world economy is becoming increasingly unstable. International rivalries are increasing, trade wars are becoming more likely as the world economic crisis forces the major capitalist blocs to fight each other over profitable markets and investment outlets throughout the world. The EC itself faces pressures that could split it apart. This is the context in which Britain, a rapidly declining imperialist power, has to solve its economic crisis.

A measure of this problem is that any economic recovery in Britain will very quickly hit a massive balance of payments constraint. Britain had a current account deficit of £6.3bn in 1991, predicted to rise to £12bn



Michael Heseltine

in 1992 and £15.5bn in 1993, despite the longest recession since the 1930s. Throughout the last recession in the early 1980s, Britain had a relatively large balance of payments surplus. An expansionist economic policy in these circumstances is doomed to fail.

This leaves us with the only significant policy development of the Autumn Statement. A pay cut for millions of public sector workers. Behind all the talk of economic recovery and of putting Britain first, is an attack on the living standards of the working class - the well tried, traditional solution that capitalism has always adopted for solving its crisis.

GATT respite

TREVOR RAYNE

John Major's 20 November description of the EC-USA oilseed agreement as 'the most important trade deal the world has ever seen' was a bit like the manager whose team has lost all season and been relegated, announcing that the most important game was the one they drew.

Trade war between the USA, the EC and Japan is inevitable. On this occasion its escalation has been avoided, only to allow imperialism to intensify its plunder of the Third World.

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was signed in 1947 when the US dominated world trade. Since 1986 the Uruguay Round of GATT talks has wrangled on, threatening to break out into open hostilities, because US dominance is now challenged.

The dispute over oilseed (soya beans, sunflower and rapeseed), used as animal feed, cooking oil and lubricants, is a US strike at the EC's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and thereby European farming itself. The CAP costs \$120bn a year, of which about \$74bn goes on price support and export subsidies. Approximately 20 per cent of EC farmers - the big ones - receive 80 per cent of direct allocations to farmers. These are defence mechanisms against the giant US farming concerns. As pigs, poultry, cattle, sheep and cereals have tumbled in price for the farmers (not the shoppers), oilseed prices have held up. Subsidised oilseed has prevented the bigger farms from going into the red. Smaller farms have gone to the wall: the number of EC farmers halved between 1970-87. US farms produce 73 per cent of world oilseed output and the EC buys 78 per cent of their exports. The CAP subsidy challenges US farm profits.

To break the CAP, the US threatened a 200 per cent tariff on \$300m of EC, mainly French, goods and threatened to escalate the penalty to nearly \$4bn of EC farm exports to the USA. In reciprocity the French government drew up a list of US products intended for EC retaliation. Compared to the giant US landholdings, French farms are miniscule, unproductive and costly. French farmers need CAP subsidies to survive and they are determined to wreck any EC-US deal that jeopardises them.

The EC-USA handshake was made over an EC agreement to limit oilseed production and cut exports by 21 per cent over six years and subsidies by 20 per cent. A greater proportion of EC farmland is to be laid fallow under the set-aside scheme.

French farmers and government willing (doubtful), the GATT talks will proceed to assault the Third World. These countries are to be opened up further to banking and financial services from the industrialised capitalists. Intellectual property rights (patents etc) are to be imposed on them by the transnational corporations. In exchange the underdeveloped nations will be given 'rights' to increase sales of cut-price 'tropical goods'.

Ireland

The IRA and its reactionary opponents

MAXINE WILLIAMS

The spate of IRA operations over the past few months has been on a larger and more widespread scale than previous mainland bombing campaigns. Targets have ranged from the City of London to transport disruption, politicians' homes, military buildings and commercial sectors. The IRA has said that only 'bad luck' prevented a very large bombing in the week of 15 November.

Although they have made arrests and two men are in custody, the British police are repeatedly having rings run round them in this campaign. Indeed it appears that they have taken to ignoring warnings from the IRA, either out of incompetence or, more likely, hoping that casualties will act as propaganda against the IRA. How else can we explain their ignoring of a clear warning about bombs on train lines on 21 October? This briefly became news when Irish police confirmed that they have passed warnings to Britain which were not acted on. The story then disappeared of course.

Our position on this, as on all previous campaigns, is clear. The Irish people and their organisations have the right to struggle for self-determination and that includes the right to choose the methods by which they struggle. Whatever casualties arise from this are the responsibility of the British governments which deny Ireland freedom and subject the people of the Six Counties to year after year of brutal terror.

Unfortunately that is not the position adopted by many allegedly socialist organisations. The RCP, for example, undoubtedly under pressure from its well-heeled, middle class membership, has chosen this moment to begin criticising IRA tactics. For them, 'the military activities of Republican movement appear to have lost a sharp, anti-imperialist focus.' Evidently the RCP does not regard the City of London or Canary Wharf as symbols of British imperialism. Perhaps too many of their members work there. Previously, they held that

British left organisations should not criticise IRA tactics. What has changed? 'Today the decline of anti-Irish chauvinism makes it possible to criticise trends in the republican movement more openly...' This decline is entirely in the minds of the RCP; it is certainly not evident to Irish victims of the PTA. However, any excuse will do to join the anti-Republican bandwagon.

The SWP has written an Open Letter to the IRA calling on them to stop the mainland bombings. They do not call on them to stop the military campaign in the Six Counties so one presumes that the unwritten text of the letter is that British casualties are more important than any others. The written text is as bad. The bombings are 'indefensible', 'no service to the fight against Britain's presence in Ireland' and anyway some of the bombs 'can only hit working class people'. The timing is particularly bad as workers are 'moving into struggle against the Tory government'.

The SWP gets most excited about the Irish question when there appears to be a danger on the mainland. They claim to oppose British occupation of Ireland but, contrary to subsequent myth, actually supported the troops being sent to Ireland in 1969. Apparently it was more willing to give an imperialist army the benefit of the doubt than an army of liberation. Anyway, IRA bombs are not generally targeted against civilians and appear, within the constraints of a military campaign, to be planned to minimise civilian casualties.

To call on the IRA to suspend its activities because the British working class may be about to fight the Tories is part of a long and dishonourable tradition which always asks the Irish to postpone or abandon its interests in favour of British ones. But when has the British Labour movement supported the Irish struggle, let alone made any sacrifices on its behalf? What would the SWP sacrifice for the Irish struggle? Would it for instance give up its habitual call for a vote for the anti-Irish Labour Party at elections? The very thought. There are some sacrifices you just can't ask a British socialist to make.



Abortion Referendum

Defend women's rights in Ireland

SIMONE DEWHURST

The Irish Constitution outlaws abortion. The recent case of a 14-year-old rape victim, forced to return to Ireland to serve the full term of her pregnancy, brought home to people the consequences of this legislation. The whole country and especially women were appalled at the disgraceful treatment of this young girl. The case brought the reality of the draconian laws to the surface and the groundswell of people's outrage forced the government to call for a new referendum.

In 1983 a referendum to amend the Irish Constitution was held to strengthen existing laws banning abortion. This amendment is now the subject of the new referendum to be held on 25 November. Its clauses state that:

- 1) Irish women be given the right to travel without restriction;
- 2) Irish women be given the right

to obtain non-directive counselling and access to unlimited information on abortion; and
3) if a woman's life is threatened (not including suicide) she will be able to obtain an abortion in Ireland.

This has reopened the whole abortion debate in Ireland. The right-wing backlash has given rise to an extreme group called Youth Defence, whose tactics include distributing pictures of so-called aborted fetuses to all age groups on the streets. The pro-life movement and the Catholic church are naturally up in arms at the prospect of even limited abortion. The mainstream political parties are invariably hedging on the issue.

In defence of women's rights a campaign called Repeal the 8th Amendment has been set up. This amendment has been used to limit severely the rights of Irish women. It:

- can be used to prevent all pregnant women, regardless

of nationality, from travelling out of Ireland

- is used to censor books, magazines, newspapers (including *The Guardian*), TV and radio programmes
- has banned non-directive counselling in Ireland
- has been used to drag students and women's clinics through the court
- forces Irish women, pregnant through rape or incest, to carry a pregnancy to full term
- allows no exception for Irish women whose health is threatened by the continuation of a pregnancy
- as demonstrated, stopped a 14-year-old rape victim from leaving the country for an abortion.

The campaign is calling for a Yes vote for the first two clauses, but rejects as dangerous any attempt to separate a woman's life from her health or to deny the existence of suicidal pregnant women. The campaign de-

mands the state protect a pregnant woman's life and her physical and emotional health without distinction. Therefore calls for a No vote on the third clause. While the campaign has only recently been set up it is gathering support on a wide basis.

It is clear that women's rights are at the forefront of this campaign, in a country where over 5,000 women a year travel to Britain to obtain abortion. Public sympathy in the case of the 14-year-old girl, plus a understanding that the issue can no longer be swept under the carpet, will hopefully see the demands of this campaign come to fruition.

A blanket No vote will see the country slide deeper into the arms of the Catholic church and the right-wing extremists. A Yes vote on the first two clauses will be a step in the right direction and hopefully give momentum to the debate on women's issues in this country.

NHS cuts

Ambulance service crumbles

ROBERT CLOUGH

Up to 20 people died on 26 and 27 October when a new computerised ambulance control system failed to cope with the volume of 999 calls made in London over the two-day period. Patients had to wait for up to 22 hours for an ambulance. Yet whilst there has been much publicity over the colossal blunder in introducing an inadequate system, there are more fundamental problems with the emergency ambulance service.

The story of the London Ambulance Service (LAS) is a story that is being repeated throughout the NHS. First, poor funding

leads to inadequate staffing. To compensate, staff work more intensively, directed by an increasingly dictatorial management.

To keep within budgets, some of the shifts in north-east London have been cut by 45 per cent, whilst all overtime has been capped. The result? Only 11 per cent of London's emergencies are attended to in seven minutes, compared with 70 per cent in Merseyside and 50 per cent in West Midlands; more than 50 per cent of calls take over 14 minutes to attend to, a time-span within which the Patient's Charter expects a 90 per cent attendance rate. Even before the final phase of the computer system went on-line, response times had deteriorated so much

that delays were implicated in 40 deaths this year.

Ambulance staff have constantly criticised the re-organisation of the LAS, geared to promote 'savings'. Yet John Wilby, the manager who was forced to resign, dismissed this as 'union whingeing', and committed the LAS to buying a computer system from a company which had no experience of computer-aided despatch systems, because its bid was less than half that from established suppliers.

Now there is to be an 'independent inquiry', whose purpose will be to protect the Health Minister, Virginia Bottomley, who was made constantly aware of the deficiencies of the new system prior to its completion.

Education

No surprises in league tables: But the Labour Party can still shock

SUSAN DAVIDSON

The publication of the examination results of every secondary school in the country in a league table is another step in the Thatcherite attempt to privatise education. Mr. Patten, the sixth and perhaps looniest of the Tory Ministers of Education, has attempted to argue that the social backgrounds of the children, the facilities of the school, the size of classes, the provision of resources, all these and more are just not good enough excuses for some schools having good results and other schools being bad. But then Mr Patten believes that young people need to believe in hell to be well behaved!

The published results cause no surprise to ordinary people. As usual, 'It's the rich wot gets the gravy - it's the poor wot get the blame'. What still surprises is

the crass grovelling of the Labour Party. Instead of coming out fighting with open condemnation of the wealthy, elitist greed of those who look after themselves, they whine and defend this indefensible class system. It is true and almost inevitable that the government has made such a mess up of the published results, getting at least 500 schools wrong but then we expect the Tories to be stupidly inefficient. But instead of welcoming the publication of these results as yet another clear pronouncement that the capitalist system cannot and will not provide a decent education system for working class children, the Labour Party gives no political fight but simply whines, 'it's not fair'.

When they are not defeatist, they are vicious. The rapid suspension of Peter Searl, Head of Highbury Grove School in Islington is a prime example of Labour Party opportunism. The ex-Head of this large boys Com-

prehensive is right-wing Tory Sir Rhodes Boyson. Highbury Grove was never more than a school which gave an academic education to a small minority at the expense of the majority of pupils. Peter Searl, in contrast, was attempting to create a school where 70 per cent of the boys would no longer be hostile and alienated. Just before the General Election, an HMI report condemned the school, failing to acknowledge the efforts that were being made. Margaret Hodge, leader of Labour-controlled Islington Council, fearing a middle class voters' backlash offered the Head £250,000 to leave. Peter Searl did not accept. He has now been suspended.

Instead of defending the school and its students, many of whom live in the poorest and most deprived part of the country, the Labour Party attacks them. With such friends working class children need no enemies.

Islington NALGO strikers fight on

ANDREW PACEY

Islington Council, flagship of the 'new realism' in Labour local authorities, continues to intimidate and victimise its workers, who have been on strike for three months.

The strikers are 700 plus NALGO members who were selected to take action when the council announced its plans to cut £12 million over an 18 month period. Originally all workers were guaranteed redeployment and the selection procedure was based on last in, first out. The council changed this to performance conduct and sickness criteria as a recipe for victimisation.

Following Labour's election defeat in April, Margaret Hodge, leader of the council, immediately promised: 'We will have to do fewer things and we will have to do them better. Doing things better means £1.5m cuts in education, 25 per cent in youth provision, 20 per cent in grants to voluntary bodies, and closure of libraries and neighbourhood offices.'

Throughout the dispute Islington Labour council has adopted tactics that would not have been out of place at Wapping: calling the police to harass pickets and using the Tory anti-union legislation to limit the number on picket lines; threatening union stewards with disciplinary procedures; circulating false information regarding the dispute and other unions' positions to all council workers.

At the end of October Islington's Labour council wrote to the strikers threatening the with re-engagement on less contracts if they did not return to work by 2 November. The intimidatory tactics have failed to break the strike and only increased the resolve of the council workforce to win the dispute.

To rub even more salt into the wounds, Margaret Hodge has left the sinking ship for greener pastures with city accountants at Price Waterhouse. We are sure that she will feel at home with sequestrators of union funds.

US Elections

The Democratic figleaf

EDDIE ABRAHAMS

The liberal and 'caring' middle classes - both in the USA and in Britain - welcomed Bill Clinton's victory in the 3 November US presidential elections. It was hailed as a deliverance from the long nightmare of Reaganism.

The Observer's Michael Ignatieff, horribly pompous as usual, reflected the tenor of middle class delusion. 'In America' he wrote, 'the ancien regime was dispatched to its inglorious conclusion'. He bemoans the fact that the British do not, unlike the Americans, 'know how to renew their politics.' Clinton, we are told 'has recaptured the language of American patriotism and put it to work for progressive, rather than reactionary causes'. When desperate the middle class has an infinite capacity to believe in the reality of its own illusions.

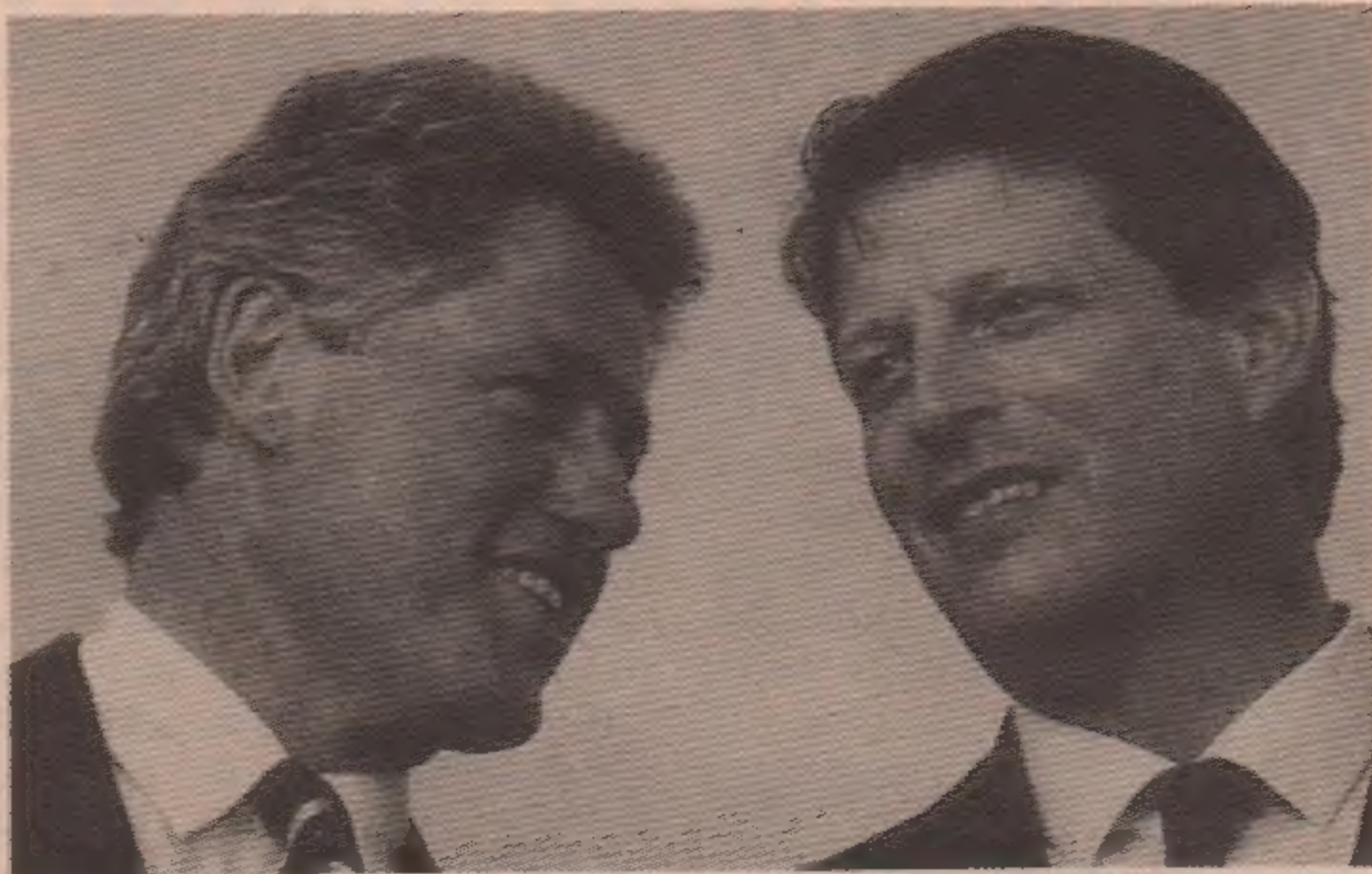
Clinton is no progressive. He is a rabid reactionary and an imperialist warmonger. His role, like that of all US Presidents, will be to defend the profits and interests of US corporations and multinationals against imperialist competitors and revolutionary challenges. In an interview

on the eve of his victory he announced that:

'My first priority both in foreign and domestic policy would be one and the same - our economy must be revived. We need to regain our economic strength... to compete and win in the global economy. Yet we still live in dangerous times and so I am committed to maintaining the world's foremost military.'

On all substantive domestic and international issues his positions differ little from those of the Bush Administration. Clinton was one of the few Democratic politicians not to oppose the Reagan/Bush war against Sandinista Nicaragua. On Cuba he is, if anything, more reactionary than Bush and supports the Torricelli Bill, which will compel US subsidiaries to end trade with Cuba. On the Middle East, the President-Elect is a virulent pro-Zionist. Asked if he supported the creation of an independent Palestinian state he replied categorically 'No I oppose that'. He aims to secure total Arab and Palestinian surrender to Israel. In threatening tones he declared that:

'The Arab boycott is economic warfare and the US should make it clear that we will no



Clinton and Gore: ready to restore US imperialism's reputation

longer turn a blind eye to this practice.'

So where is all the 'hope' and 'progress'? Where is that 'wind of change' and 'political renewal' that middle class pundits profess to see. It rests in, and does not go beyond, bland and generalised promises of social and economic reform with which Clinton clinched the disturbed white middle class vote. Like British elections, US presidential elections are determined by the votes of the white middle class. The profound economic crisis has shaken the complacency of the white middle class in the USA. It is suffering job

losses and the collapse of public services. It cannot pay its suburban mortgages and nor can it afford the increasingly exorbitant cost of health care insurance. It is also terrified that the decaying economy will spark even more uprisings, like that in Los Angeles, and upset its placid life. So to win their votes Clinton spoke about the need for change, for caring, for progress.

Despite the massive Federal Government deficit and the continuing recession, Clinton offered no detailed costing and threatened no widespread tax increases to finance new health care, public service and other projects. But the middle class,

gripped by panic, was captivated by words. Economists calculate that annually \$100bn is required to even begin to tackle the collapsed state of the US public services. Clinton has mentioned figures not exceeding \$20bn. The benefits of such small expenditures will accrue only to a tiny proportion of the middle classes. They will not touch the majority whose conditions will deteriorate.

The poorest and most oppressed sections of the US working class did not participate in the election - a full 47 per cent of the electorate did not vote. The Promised Land is not for them. Although black people make up 12 per cent of the US population they receive only 7.8 per cent of personal incomes. 45 per cent of black children live below the poverty line. The median household income of black people is 60 per cent that of whites. The much cited cost of welfare payments is negligible compared to the benefits paid to the well-off. \$50bn, 56 per cent of housing subsidies goes to the richest 20 per cent of the population in the form of mortgage relief. The poorest 20 per cent get \$15bn.

Clinton has no intention of altering and will not tolerate any challenge to the economic system of private property and production for profit which is founded on the dispossession of the majority. Writing in the *New Statesman* Alexander Cockburn notes that:

'Clinton is the ultimate distillation of neo-liberalism. He thinks of human liberation in terms of asset management. Asked about poor education or lousy health care, he speaks only of "competitiveness", never about how such blights constrain people from living happier lives. Asked about the debt crisis in third-world countries, he says it is a problem because it "has lessened their capacity to buy American goods and probably cost us 1.5 million jobs".'

Clinton is no friend of the poor, of the black and Hispanic worker. He is no friend of the oppressed, no friend of the hungry, of the unemployed. He is no friend of the common mass of humanity. In his eulogy to Clinton, pompous Ignatieff did correctly identify Clinton's friends: 'public policy professors at Ivy League universities, partners in big law firms, key state governors, big city mayors, business tycoons, leading entertainers and labour leaders.' A man is judged by the friends he keeps. Like every US President before him, Clinton will resort to any cruelty, any lie, any expense and any barbarism to look after such wealthy and privileged friends. Those who see in Clinton a harbinger of hope and progress merely equate hope and progress with the interests of the middle class. They thereby sully the very notion of hope and progress. ■

South Africa

ANC accepts power-sharing option

CAT WIENER

On 19 November, against a background of yet more damning evidence from the Goldstone Commission implicating FW de Klerk directly in the cover-up of the activities of CCB death squads, the ANC's National Working Committee formally accepted a discussion document committing the organisation to power-sharing with the Nationalist Party. The announcement was not unexpected. The discussion paper was circulated to ANC regions (confidentially and in limited numbers) after the ANC's October conference, and key elements - compulsory power-sharing and a commitment to civil servants and military of assured tenure for a number of years - had already been publicly voiced by SACP General Secretary Joe Slovo, prime mover behind the document. The document argues that mass action and international pressure are no longer feasible options for the ANC and proposes instead to accept the government's proposal for a Transitional Executive Council with the aim of securing agreement on elections for a Constituent Assembly and the establishment of an 'Interim Government of National Unity'. In this period, 'peace' would be consolidated through joint control over all armed forces. In addition, the proposals provide for the government of national unity continuing beyond the elec-

tion of a constituent assembly. It includes a general amnesty for prisoners - the very proposal that Klerk was unable to get through special session of his white-only parliament in October, and had to take to the President's Council.

The truth is that the ANC, in choosing to abandon mass action and sanctions, has placed itself in the regime's hands. If implemented, this proposal will amount to the abandonment by the ANC of any commitment to majority rule. It mirrors closely de Klerk's own strategy. Speaking to the SA Club and invited guests (including long-standing apartheid ally Lady Thatcher) in London on 13 November, de Klerk stated: 'I will not say yes to a winner-take-all constitution which can result in just another form of domination'. He has also made it clear that those who draw up the constitution will not have *carte blanche* - ie the regime will maintain firm control over the entire constitutional process.

However, selling such a deal to their respective constituencies will not be plain sailing for either the ANC or de Klerk. The Mandela/de Klerk meeting planned for 22 November to discuss the issues has been postponed to mid-December because of protest on both sides. De Klerk's government is divided, as Allister Sparks suggests in the *Observer* (15 November 1992) between the hardliners who want an alliance with Inkatha and no truck with the ANC; and the

'pragmatists' who prefer the option that power-sharing with the ANC would bring - a nominally 'non-racial' South Africa which in practice protects white minority rule, while ensuring that all remaining sanctions are lifted.

At the same time the de Klerk regime is beset with new revelations about its dirty tricks strategy - including the involvement of the RUC in surveillance of and offer to 'take out' Dirk Coetzee, the ex-police officer who blew the whistle on apartheid's undercover operations. It was also revealed that de Klerk personally appointed Lieutenant-General Alwyn Conradie, who had already participated in the cover-up of one hit-squad scandal, to investigate military intelligence operations, and that former CCB member Ferdi Barnard, thought to have been involved in the murder of anti-apartheid activist David Webster in 1989, had been hired to head a task force aimed at discrediting the ANC. De Klerk was quick to issue a statement playing down the findings, and criticising Goldstone (Mandela welcomed de Klerk's statement as 'a good, encouraging step'). De Klerk's right-wing, meanwhile, is angry about what it sees as concessions being made to the ANC, a resentment that led to the resignation of Stoeffel van Merwe, a senior member of de Klerk's cabinet.

The ANC, by signing the Declaration of Understanding which brought it back into talks

with the regime after the Bisho massacre in September, made it clear that it would throw in its lot with the government. Apart from releasing 42 prisoners, the government has done nothing to meet the agreements. Yet on 15 November, the deadline for the agreed fencing-off of Zulu hostels, Ramaphosa announced: 'We are well into the transition process'. An ANC spokesman stated that the disclosure that Constitutional Development Minister Roelf Meyer had personally authorised Operation Echoes, aimed at destabilising the ANC, would not affect bilateral talks. But this conciliatory tone is not shared by all its members. The discussion document has caused widespread anger, particularly amongst members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, and militant regions such as Natal, where it is rumoured that the ANC leadership has lost control. Indeed, at the funeral for murdered ANC regional organiser Reggie Hadebe in early November, the biggest cheer of the crowds was reserved for the ANC's National Youth Leader when he declared that now was the time 'to fight for liberation' against the state-sponsored violence.

If the ANC ignores these voices and presses ahead with its proposals, these forces may well find alternative leadership. On 22 and 23 October the PAC leadership held a two-day summit meeting with apartheid Foreign Minister Pik Botha, in Gaborone, to discuss arrangements for the setting up of an elected constituent assembly. The regime, admitting that it could not sway the PAC from its commitment to the armed struggle until there was one person one vote in South Africa, and that the PAC's armed wing, APLA, had inflicted serious casualties on the South African military, published a joint state-

ment with the PAC. In it they accepted that Codesa was undemocratic and defunct, and that a new forum should be set up. The PAC is continuing to press for a Patriotic Front to advance the demand for an elected constituent assembly, and has the backing of the OAU in this demand. Zimbabwean President Mugabe offered to host a meeting of the PAC and the ANC with a view to the Patriotic Front being reconvened, and with some reluctance, the ANC is now considering this.

Undoubtedly, the regime is playing a duplicitous game and attempting to keep all its options open. Nevertheless, it provides a window of opportunity for the PAC to advance the aims of the oppressed, and offers an alternative strategy to the one being propounded by the ANC, which may well prove crucial in the coming period.

For the ANC's insistence that it would retain emergency powers of detention without trial to deal with 'public disorder' does not bode well for the increasingly impoverished and militant black working class. An ANC/National Party coalition would bring benefits only to a tiny, privileged minority of black people. The majority will have no option but to continue the struggle for majority rule. If the ANC does do a deal over power-sharing and joint control over the security forces with the regime, there is little doubt that detentions, terror and repression of resistance will continue.

Angola

When the Angolan general elections gave President dos Santos and the ruling MPLA a clear lead, Jonas Savimbi accused the electoral process, declared free and fair by western observers, of

having been rigged. His UNITA forces attacked Luanda in early November. The Angolan people responded with guns and routed UNITA troops in a bloody battle which left 1,000 dead, including top-ranking UNITA officials. The US and South Africa - backers of UNITA - and the UN are now pressurising the MPLA to accept power-sharing. The MPLA won the elections, but the fact that dos Santos got just under 50 per cent gives the imperialists an excuse to call a run-off election, and attempt again to put their puppet in power. This is democracy, imperialist-style. But the Angolan people have shown that they can thwart imperialism's plans. Not prepared to vote for a psychopath whose army specialised in torture and mutilation, they have now shown that, in the face of UNITA threats of terror, they will take up arms and fight. ■

Kurdistan at the crossroads

In Kurdistan, differences which have been sharpening since the Gulf War have exploded into open war. In October the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and Union of Patriotic Kurds (PUK) launched an attack against the PKK's bases in south Kurdistan (northern Iraq). The attack began after a series of visits by Massoud Barzani and Celal Talabani to Turkey and the West. The failure of these attacks led to direct intervention by the Turkish army. The Turkish state has now extended its occupation into south Kurdistan (northern Iraq). It judges the bourgeois and feudal leaders too weak to control the poor peasant- and worker-based PKK. The attempt to dislodge the PKK was a sharpening of the class struggle in the Kurdish movement. ■

STOP PIT CLOSURES

It's time to fight back

In the weeks since the government announced its phoney review of the pit closure programme, the issue has largely disappeared from the front pages. Local protests continue and a long march from Scotland has begun, but the Heseltine review achieved its immediate aim – it took the steam out of the situation. Under the cloak of the review, the 10 pits earmarked for immediate closure are being allowed to deteriorate possibly beyond hope of recovery. The lack of serious, sustained and organised response from the Labour Party and TUC has aided this process.

Yet the initial government announcement that it was to close 31 pits, destroying two thirds of the coal industry and sacking 30,000 miners, provoked anger more widespread than has been seen in the past fifteen years. MAXINE WILLIAMS analyses the disparate forces which have come out in solidarity with the miners.

Tens of thousands of people – miners thrown on the scrapheap since 1985 as well as those now under threat, unemployed people, students, trade unionists from other sectors and, extraordinarily, middle class people – responded. It was on the Lobby of Parliament that this diversity was most clearly seen. From the now-sacked Welsh miners who surrounded Labour MP Frank Dobson shouting 'Get off your backside Dobson', to the Scarborough Chamber of Commerce and Hoteliers who politely muttered as their Conservative MP patronised them. From the 75-year-old woman from Barnsley who walked through the streets of London to the small group of fairly well-heeled women holding placards saying: 'Charlbury Says It's Not Good Enough'.

A rum coalition of forces indeed, but one that accurately reflects the effects of the current crisis. Already each month almost 40,000 people join the existing 3 million unemployed. The new round of public spending cuts means more jobs lost, more services lost. As always it is the working class, particularly the poorest sections who have borne the brunt of this. But now the icy fingers of slump have reached out to touch those whom Thatcher claimed to raise to the ranks of wealth. 80,000 businesses will go bankrupt and 65,000 homes will be repossessed this year. The heady dreams of 'people's capitalism' peddled in Thatcherite Britain – the shareholding, property-owning democracy – have proved to be a nightmare of insecurity, debt and growing poverty.

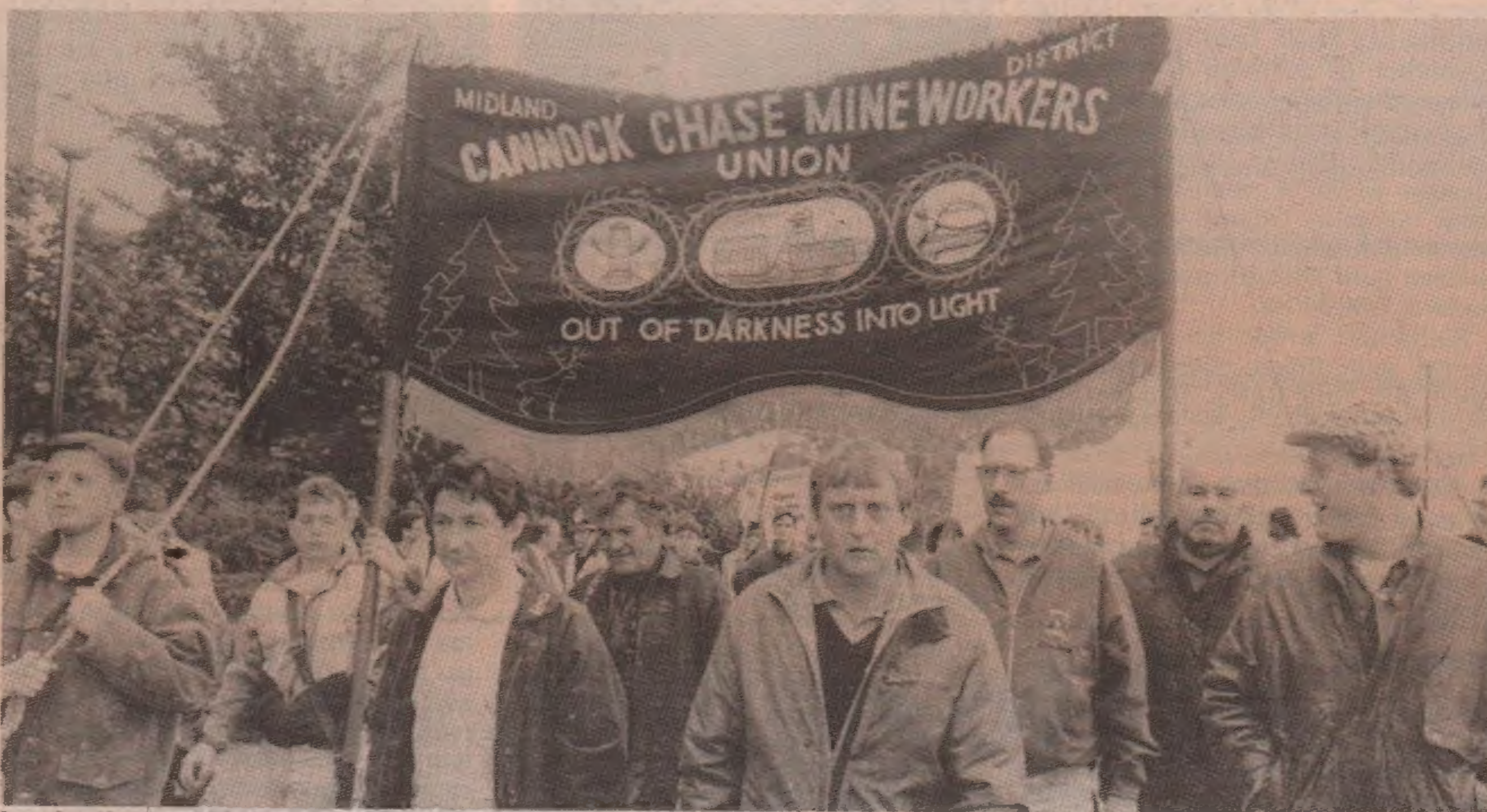
The pit closure issue acted as a lightning conductor for anger on these issues. Whilst it has been temporarily dampened, it continues to smoulder beneath the surface. Only a bucketful of do-nothing Labourism could have so effectively doused such flames of resentment. Indeed only an Opposition of the staggering ineptitude, lack of principle and alternative policies of the Labour Party could have failed to capitalise on the plethora of crises and scandals with which this government is beset. A major slump, pit closures, a split over Maastricht, the juicy scandal of Iragate – still Labour cannot manage to get this vastly unpopular and discredited government on the run. Give Labour a gifthouse and apparently they not only examine its mouth, they let it eat them.

Tory splits show depth of crisis

As a result of the current crisis the Tories are more deeply split than for decades. The Conservative Party only splits in this way when under extreme pressure. The whips may have used (literally) neck-twisting tactics to get the rebels into the pro-Maastricht lobby, far more than they needed to do with Winston Churchill's nine-hour wonder rebellion on mine closures, but nothing can conceal the cracks.

Tory MPs, lacking the talent or initiative to do anything but sit in the Mother of Parliaments, are feeling the cold wind of impending redundancy at their backs as they listen to their localities. When Tory hearts begin to bleed about 'poverty' and Tory tongues talk of 'compassion', it means they are frightened. They are frightened that people might begin to see where the blame lies.

gas-fired electricity stations and sold the power to themselves at prices which they artificially inflated. Although it would have been cheaper to buy coal power, they made more profit by selling high-priced gas-fired power to themselves. After all, electricity consumers have no choice but to pay whatever price is asked. The companies have raked in the money but demand for coal has fallen. The



Local action is still being organised: the miners must not be isolated

Where does the blame lie?

Some would have us believe that the Tories have merely mismanaged the economy and blind us with incomprehensible jargon about Exchange Rate Mechanisms. But the simple truth is that an economy run for profit, for making a small number of people rich, thrives by robbing people. It robs the majority of people of Britain and even more shamelessly it robs the people of the poor nations. It does not care if people live or die. It does not care if the earth survives. It cares only for profit. And if, to make more profit (which they call becoming 'leaner and fitter') requires throwing millions on the dole, it will do it. If it requires the decimation of manufacturing industry, it will do it – hence two million jobs were shed in manufacturing in the 1980s. If it means the City selling currency and speculating, at the expense of the British taxpayer, it will do it. This is not mismanagement. This is the system of profit.

Why they want to close the mines

One of the Tories' favourite methods of making the rich richer is to sell them nationalised industries at knock-down prices. The electricity industry had particularly rich pickings. The privatised regional electricity companies found themselves in the delightful position of being both producers of power and purchasers. They built their own cheap

pits must close. 'Market forces' say the Tories. What they mean is that the bankers and big investors who own the power companies are on a looting spree and the miners and the consumers must pay the price. When British Coal Commercial Director Malcolm Edwards warned about this he was sacked. When the House of Commons Select Committee on Energy criticised it, they were disbanded. Nor is it any coincidence that the privatisation of British Coal scheduled for next year and a 'leaner, fitter' industry will be more attractive to the profit-hungry vultures.

The capitalists may worship at the shrine of market forces, but not when these apply to themselves. When the electricity industry was being privatised, they realised that the costs of nuclear energy were prohibitively high. So this sector was excluded. The poor old taxpayer has to pay for the £1.3 billion per year that it costs to subsidise nuclear electricity. But evidently subsidies for the mines would be a sin against the Holy Market.

Heseltine's review is not likely to change the situation. At best it will delay the closure of some of the pits so that they can be more quietly and gradually closed next year. The scale of government cynicism was best displayed when they announced that Sir Peter Walker would oversee the spending of a derisory aid package to create jobs in pit closure areas. Walker was not only the Energy Secretary during the 1984-85 miners' strike, he

also happens to be a Director of British Gas and former Vice Chairman of bankers NM Rothschild, the main government adviser on the coming privatisation of the coal industry. The Tories announced Walker's appointment at the height of public anger over pit closures. With that anger demobilised, imagine what they will do. They will try the phased-in closure approach and will divide opposition by claiming that the miners, in opposing all pit closures, are being unreasonable. Some of those fair-weather friends, sections of the press and Tory rebels, who seemed to be on the side of the miners in October, will disappear.

Beware false friends

In 1984-85 the miners fought a mighty struggle against pit closures. They were attacked, 9,000 were arrested, 152 gaoled, and 2 striking miners killed. If they had won, the shape of British politics would have been greatly altered. Instead, they were



Britain.' A businessman from the manufacturing sector: 'Get the nation back to work – For a Better Britain.' Norman Willis: 'Let Government bring people together – management and unions'. And spearheading this Let's Back Britain campaign – the Labour Party. Hoping against hope that it can weld together under this patriotic and pro-capitalist umbrella social forces sufficient to unseat the Conservatives and instead, let Labour run Britain in the interests of the profiteers. No reliance can be placed on the Labour Party and TUC. Themselves wedded to the system of profit (but wanting to make it sound softer and kinder), they do not represent the mass of people in Britain and they certainly will not spearhead a campaign against pit closures. The North West TUC having reluctantly organised a Day of Action in November, wanted to cancel it in favour of... a Convention with the Confederation of British Industry.

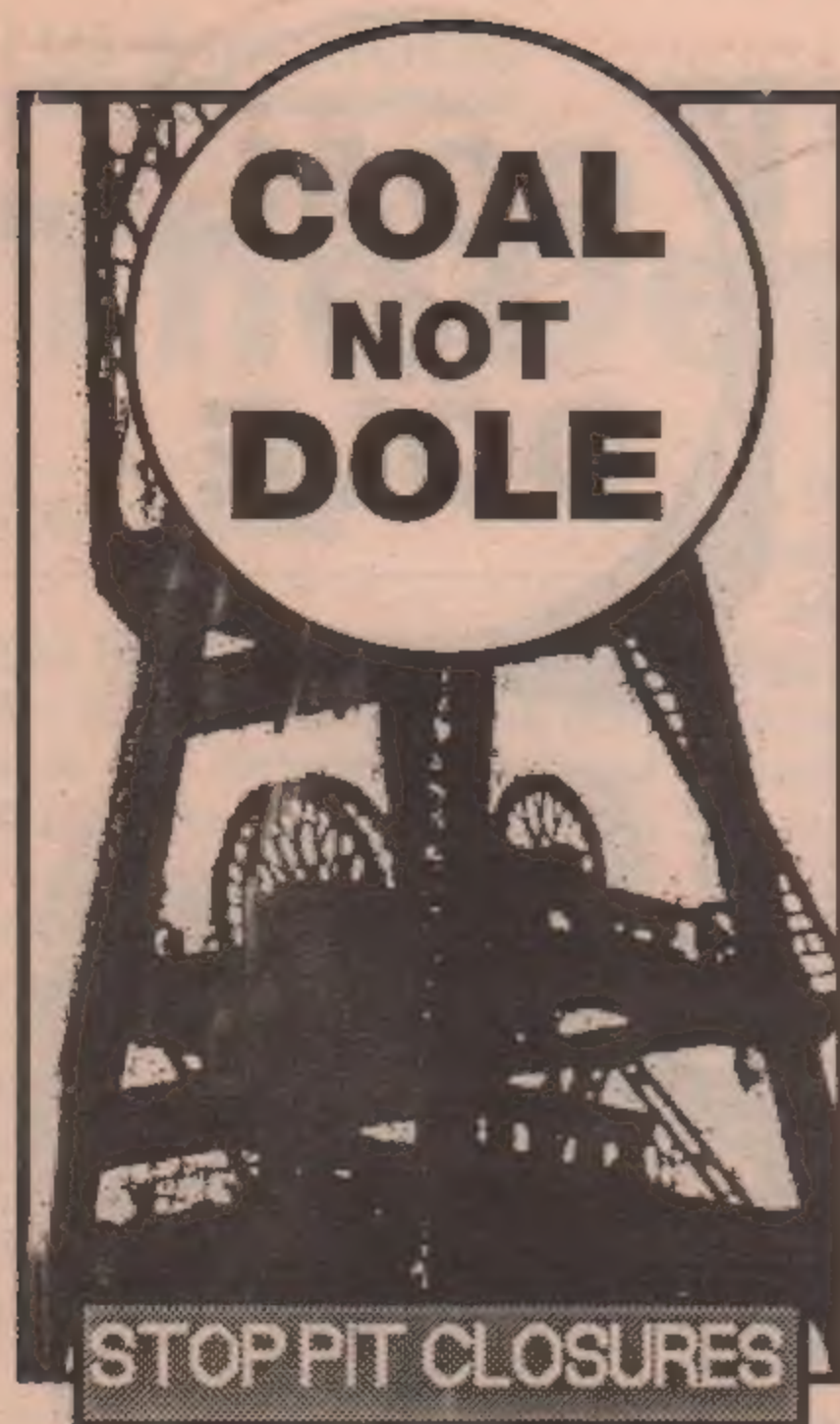
Such a strategy spells disaster for the miners. The issue for them is their jobs and communities. The CBI is not world famous for its concern for either – remember the two million jobs shed in manufacturing. Manufacturing businesses may be heartily fed up with Tory policies but they are in business to make profits and it is the profit system that impoverishes the working class.

It is certainly true that new alliances must be built – the diversity of forces reacting to the pit closures showed that – but on what basis? The issue in this case is clear – no pit closures, no redundancies. That is the only basis for a campaign and the bottom line for an alliance. If other social forces want to offer support to this campaign they should be welcomed, but the miners and their fight for jobs should dictate the terms, not the Labour Party and its shabby bid for power, or the CBI and its lust for lower interest rates.

Go out to the people!

Arthur Scargill has said very clearly 'Don't leave the miners isolated'. He has drawn on the lessons of 1984/85 to call for People's Power to fight the closures. He is quite right. It is they – the unemployed or those facing redundancy, the youth with no hope, the black people facing racist attack, the old people on pitiful pensions, the women struggling to bring up children, the people facing the repossessions – it is they who will support the struggle. They need local and democratic organisations to organise their support. Most of them are not Labour Party members or even trade unionists, and it is grossly sectarian to limit local organisation to that of the official Labour Movement.

It is time that people who want to see a real fight against unemployment and cutbacks, forgot the old ways and stopped relying on the do-nothing Labour Party. Let us build a People's Movement, a fighting movement, a movement capable of getting rid of the profit system. Let's begin by stopping the pit closures. ■



British Coal and the monopolies

The British government's plan to close 31 pits and sack 30,000 miners conforms to the process of monopolisation taking place in the world's \$1,000 billion a year energy industry. Fuel extraction, refining and transportation; production of power generating machinery, power generation and distribution are dominated by a handful of global giants which direct government policy. British Coal (even in its depleted state, one of the world's top five mining organisations) is an obstacle to their plans. As such it will either be absorbed by them through privatisation or it will go. TREVOR RAYNE examines the forces behind the destruction of the British coal industry.

Karl Marx described how capital's problems of accumulation drove it to concentrate into larger units, bigger firms, with increased scales of production. He analysed the tendency to centralisation whereby ever greater proportions of total capital fall into fewer hands through elimination, takeovers and mergers. Lenin traced how these developments, accelerated by credit, resulted in monopoly capital; the combination into huge cartels of banking and industrial firms which divide the world up between them in pursuit of markets, materials and labour.

The concentration of capital requires its expansion into overseas markets. The export of capital and appropriation of raw materials, in this case fuel, increases the rate of profit. Control over raw materials leads to control over processing industries, in this case power generation. Ultimately, monopoly capital integrates whole branches of industry under a single financial empire that permeates all aspects of social and political reality across the globe. It may appear like a hydra with many heads, but beneath the different corporate names revolves a single financial hub. This is the tendency of modern capitalism.

This dominant feature of contemporary life is precisely what opponents of Marxism either ignore or reject in their invocations to the market and competition. If the miners' jobs are to be defended, then monopoly capital must be exposed from its position behind the British government and confronted.

Rothschild the prophet

'Money is the god of our times and Rothschild is his prophet' (Heinrich Heine)

From the announcement in 1986 that electricity would be privatised to today, electricity prices have risen by about 40 per cent. NHS electricity bills will be up 14 to 28 per cent this year. Privatisation replaced the state's Central Electricity Generating Board monopoly with private monopolies intent on maximising profits.

National Power and PowerGen, the two main generating companies, have announced that from April 1993 they will cut purchases from British Coal from over 60 million tonnes to 40 million and then down to 30 million tonnes for each of the following four years. Electricity purchases accounted for 80 per cent of mined coal production. President of the Board of Trade Michael Heseltine claims that not producing '25 million tonnes of coal that nobody wants' will save £1.25 bn a year, and give a 3 per cent cut in electricity bills. Compare this 3 per cent cut with the 40 per cent rise in electricity prices. The British government proclaims a policy of 'fuel diversification'. The 'over-capacity' of coal production results directly from the giant fuel and power monopolies' scramble for resources and markets. This will, in turn, lead to a 30 per cent 'over-capacity' in power generation within 3 years spurring more concentration and centralisation of production, one element of which is the privatisation of British Coal.

The government's adviser on coal privatisation is the merchant bank NM Rothschild. Rothschild produced a report projecting 32 pit closures. Its

plan is, in effect, the government's plan.

Rothschild was an appropriate choice for the job. It raised £20 million to compensate slave owners upon the 1833 abolition, lent Disraeli £4 million to buy the Suez Canal, financed the Crimean and Boer Wars and funded Cecil Rhodes' development of South African gold and diamond mining. Rothschild helped found Royal Dutch Shell and invested in southern African uranium reserves. One of its directors sits on the board of Shell. Lord Peter Walker, appointed by Michael Heseltine to oversee the mining areas 'regeneration programme' is a former director of NM Rothschild (Wales) Ltd and current director of Smith New Court investment company, whose vice-chair is also vice-chair of NM Rothschild. Add to these Lord Walker's position on the board of British Gas.

Rothschild is tied by loans, share capital and mutual directorships to Shell, BP, Rolls Royce, Barclays, National Westminster Bank, Lloyds Bank, Standard Chartered Bank and the Royal Bank of Scotland. It stands at the heart of monopoly capital, fusing banks and industrial companies and directing them towards their most profitable feeding grounds.

'Supplier of choice'

In the six years following the defeat of the miners' strike, coal mining productivity was lifted from 2.5 tonnes per man per shift to approximately 5 tonnes. Former energy secretary Cecil Parkinson remarked that British Coal would become the 'supplier of choice' to the privatised electricity industry.

Parkinson spoke about the effects of the six day week that was established in the pits with flexible shifts and the concentration of investment in the high-productivity deposits such as Asfodby in the Vale of Belvoir and Hawkhurst-Moor in Warwickshire. In 1991-92 British Coal made an overall profit of £170 million on collieries, with a 19.1 per cent profit on average capital employed. Nevertheless, British Coal lobbied the government for the 1992 Coal Industry Act which can overturn the 1908 Coal Miners Regulation Act restricting the amount of time miners can work underground. British Coal estimates that the repeal could add 15 per cent to productivity. Still this is not enough. Hence, two-thirds of the industry is to be closed.

British Coal corporate membership displays the hand of multinational monopoly capital. The chair, Neil Clarke, graduated from Oppenheimer's Anglo-American Corporation and metal traders Johnson Matthey. Other members are either currently with or came from the boards of Rio Tinto Zinc, Consolidated Goldfields, Sun Oil, Britoil (bought by BP for £2.4 billion in 1988), Unilever, Harland and Wolff etc. They view the international energy market and see a world coal price based on production costs in South Africa, Australia and the USA of £30 a tonne compared to British Coal's £43 a tonne. This guides their management of the coal fields, their labour speed-ups, closures and investment strategies - both in Britain and abroad.

The biggest growth in world coal exports are from South Africa and Australia,



lia, with rapid increases from Colombia and Indonesia. Many of these resources are owned by the firms that dominate the British and world energy industries: BP, Shell, Exxon, Mitsubishi and even British Coal. British Coal has developed its own subsidiary, International Mining Consultants to sell mining expertise overseas and has a majority holding in Inter-Continental Fuels, which invests directly in the international coal trade.

The 'share-owning democracy'

'A straight transfer of wealth to those with the cash to buy shares' The *Financial Times* 'Lex' column on privatisation

A 1991 Treasury report celebrated the extension of share ownership from 7 per cent of the adult population in 1979 to 25 per cent in 1991. Privatisation had given power back to the people etc. In fact, privatisation has increased the centralisation of ownership and control in Britain. What the Treasury report does not record is that in 1963 individuals owned half the shares quoted on the Stock Exchange, in 1975 37.5 per cent and in 1991 less than 20 per cent. An increasing proportion of shares are held by the City institutions: banks, insurance companies and pension funds.

When the twelve regional electricity distribution companies were privatised in December 1990 they could have been sold 10.7 times over, such was the over-subscription. Over 10 per cent of the shares were re-sold within two hours of dealing. On the first day Manweb shares made a profit of 66 per cent and Seaboard made 42 per cent. Within a month the Prudential had acquired 4 per cent of Norweb's shares, 3.8 per cent of Eastern Electricity and 5.1 per cent of South Western Electricity. Legal and General had 3.1 per cent of Midlands Electricity, the Bank of New York 5.7 per cent of South Western Electricity. After one and a half days of trading Welsh Water had 10 per cent of South Wales Electricity. Up to three-quarters of the water companies' shares are owned by City institutions.

The same situation prevails at PowerGen and National Power. Over 72 per cent of PowerGen's shares are owned by 0.01 per cent of its shareholders. These huge blocks are represented on the boards of directors. PowerGen's chair is Sir Graham Day, also a director of British Aerospace, Cadbury Schweppes, the Bank of Nova Scotia, Laird Group, Thorn EMI etc. Other PowerGen directors come from the Bank of England, the Prudential, Legal and Gen-

eral, Enterprise Oil and a number of investment trusts. National Power's board includes representations from the Lloyd's Council, Municipal Life Assurance, National Westminster Bank and the Bank of England. Energy interests are also present: BOC, British Aerospace and a few crematoria concerns. This pattern of ownership and control interlocks with those of the big oil companies and power generator manufacturers.

A privatised British Coal is already in the sights of the same companies that own electricity and water. The defence of miners' jobs requires opposition to the privatisation of British Coal. Privatisation means that monopoly capital's pit closure plans will be applied directly rather than through the agency of the government.

'The dash for gas'

PowerGen, National Power and the twelve distribution companies have replaced British Coal orders with orders of overseas coal and gas. Both sets of firms have been buying into the new Combined Cycle Gas Turbine generators and establishing new subsidiaries to manage them. The British government has campaigned on their behalf to overturn European Community restrictions on the use of natural gas for electricity generation. If all the gas powered generator contracts currently on stream are implemented, Britain will soon have a 30 per cent over-capacity in electricity, while domestic gas reserves are used up over the next decade. These reserves are largely owned by the big oil companies. Additional reserves are being targeted in the rest of Europe, north Africa and Russia.

Energy experts dispute whether coal or gas is the most cost-effective and rational fuel for power generation. Some cite a 50 per cent energy conversion rate for gas to electricity, compared to 37 per cent for coal. Others propose new, cleaner and more productive coal generating processes:

'The true competitive position of gas vis-a-vis coal is hard to ascertain because the crucial figures are closely held commercial secrets...' (*Financial Times* 22 October 1992).

Considerations of energy efficiency in terms of kilowatt hours or conversion rates miss the point. The energy resources are owned by monopolies who manipulate costs and prices and wield enormous political power not for efficient energy use, but for profits. In these circumstances the government's 'Energy Review' is a fraud and a facade. There can be no question of a rational energy industry, of efficient energy or of environmentally-friendly energy until the monopolies are confronted and replaced with socialist ownership.

The world's power generation machinery industry is now dominated by four groups: General Electric of the USA which combines the Anglo-French GEC-Alsthom, Hitachi and Toshiba; the Swedish Swiss combine Asea Brown Boveri (ABB); the German firm Siemens; and the US, British, Japanese Westinghouse, Rolls Royce and Mitsubishi. These amalgams are constructed around research and development, production and contracts. They also collaborate with the oil

major.

Between 1987-89 General Electric concentrated on producing gas turbines. It cut component production time in half and reduced costs. The rest of the groups formed followed the gas turbine route. In the past three years the British electricity industry has bought more plant than in the previous fifteen. All four groups have won orders for their gas turbines; the General Electric group winning 62 per cent of them. 'The wave of ordering had nothing to do with the usual process of analysing demand trends... The sole criterion was whether the ordering plant had a good chance of making money for the owners.' *Financial Times* 31 July 1992.

The shift from coal to gas is producing a scramble for reserves and markets that require the centralisation of capital into these huge blocks. On a reduced scale it resembles the scramble for oil earlier this century when the development of the diesel-engine substituted liquid fuel for coal and BP and Shell were formed to promote British imperialism. Eastern Europe and Russia contain the largest known reserves of natural gas in the world.

Noticeably, since 1989 General Electric has bought into the Hungarian electrical goods firm Tungstam, but its priority has been western Europe; ABB has invested in power generation in Poland and eastern Germany; Siemens has established a plant in Turkey and invested in Poland and Czechoslovakia. British Gas has bought in to Germany's gas industry and is bidding for contracts in Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia. It is engaged in exploration and production in the former Soviet Republics. Similar levels of activity are occurring in south and east Asia. Most of them are scouting Moscow with 'advisers' and accountants.

British Petroleum

The oil companies and banks constitute the most powerful faction of monopoly capital. They write government policy. BP, Shell and Total were given leases to handle half of South Africa's coal exports. No wonder the British government opposes sanctions against apartheid. BP is the largest holder of US oil reserves. Its 1991 report states an intention to expand natural gas sales to Britain. Investments have been made in Australian, Indonesian and German gas. A new gas trading company is being formed with Norway's Norsk Hydro. Norway has large gas reserves. BP has holdings in the new North Sea Miller, Pickerill and Bruce gas fields.

BP's recent discovery of a 'world class oil find' in Colombia is illuminating. Colombia's state-owned Ecopetrol has a negotiable 50 per cent option on the field. Since 1989 the British government has invested in a Colombian power station, British Coal has established a Colombian coal trading subsidiary and during his June 1992 Latin American visit John Major was reported in the Colombian press to be fighting to prevent European Community restrictions on Colombian coal imports. While Colombia's coal export business uses modern mining equipment, its domestic coal production harnesses the use of child labour. British police and SAS provide specialist services to the Colombian state.

BP is tied through its Morgan banking group holdings to General Electric. Its directors intertwine with Deutsche Bank, Volkswagen, Barings, Rolls Royce, Caterpillar, Barclays, Allied Irish Banks, Unilever and BAT. They include a former Commander-in-Chief of UK Land Forces, a former President of the CBI and a former Head of the Diplomatic Service.

This is finance capital, the monopolists of power, who rotate their careers through boardrooms, government departments and officer high command. For them the British government is but an executive committee. They are the enemies of the British miners and workers and the poor everywhere. They must be exposed, their machinations must be nailed, and finally they must be fought and overcome. Defence of the miners' jobs is an excellent starting place. ■

For an analysis of multinational capital and the coal industry in 1985 see 'Imperialism versus the miners: "A little local difficulty"' by Trevor Rayne in *Miners' Strike 1984-85: People versus State* by David Reed and Olivia Adamson.

Support the miners

Within hours of the government's announcement, the RCG in Dundee started organising opposition to the pit closures. We held street rallies and initiated the Dundee Miners Support Group. This has collected over 5,000 signatures and collected over £500.

As communists we do not see the fight for the miners' jobs as either apolitical or separate from the overall fight against unemployment. The fight to save jobs in the pits is the fight for all the unemployed. In the textile industry 100,000 jobs have been lost in each of the last four years; 25,000 fishing jobs will go by the end of this year.

That's why the Dundee Miners Support Group has chosen to work in a way that reaches out to people. We've taken the campaign to the unemployed, to the working class areas like Lochee. And we organise in a democratic way that involves everybody. At the last meeting there were 20 people and every one spoke; we have organised a crèche so that people with children can come to meetings. Everyone has a contribution

to make and most of our discussion is about how to go out to people because the disease of unemployment is spreading and we might all catch it soon.

The only open hostility to our work has come from the Labour Party and its left wing - the SWP. There are 16,500 Labour Party members in Scotland but 20,000 unemployed workers in Dundee alone. Yet the Labour politicians and their supporters want to concentrate organisation in the Labour Party and trade unions. The SWP, for example, said they could not get involved in the Support Group without the backing of the Trades Council. Instead they concentrate on getting shop stewards and union officials to sign statements in support of the miners.

We will continue with our work, rallies, petitions, publicity, meetings, and would encourage others to set similar groups up in their towns. We must get organised now in defence of miners' jobs and against unemployment.

Mike, Karene, Karen, Rory, Andrew, Simon, Susan and Andy



Dundee Miners Support Group out on the streets

Two demonstrations, and the left appears to have lost its collective head: calls for a general strike have become the rage. The SWP wants it to be indefinite, as do sundry other Trotskyist groups; more modestly, Militant would settle for a 24-hour one, provided there were an immediate miners' one as well.

The left are quite overcome. Following the two October demonstrations, John Rees for *Socialist Worker* talked of the 'ferocity of the storm', referring to the 'undoubted mood for a general strike among a very wide layer of workers'. However, he rather undoes the effect later on when he decides that the majority of workers still support 'new realism'. But, undeterred, he continues: 'unlike the poll tax, the movement is now one of the organised working class even if, as yet, the level of industrial action remains low', leaving us wondering where the ferocious storm has got to.

Beneath the hyperbole, we find things are a little less radical. The first point is that neither the SWP nor the Militant have enough troops to determine whether a single union supported a general strike, however short its duration. Hence the call is in reality without practical consequences, least of all one involving a challenge to the state. Furthermore, if the purpose of this strike is to finally 'kick the Tories out', its unspoken intent must be to force the election of a Labour Government. It sounds like a lot of effort to get a government of 'new realism' - but maybe this is a gauge of the value the SWP and Militant place on it, and why they wish to use the struggle of the miners to pursue their narrow sectarian aims.

Certainly the call does not commit the left to fighting the leadership of

the official labour movement - indeed, the SWP is conspicuous by its absence from the miners' support groups the 'official' movement has belatedly set up, whilst Militant delegates echo the left officials who regard such committees as their personal property. Neither has proved willing or capable of organising groups where the 'official' movement has decided not to bother. In short, there is no conflict with either organisation's support for Labour.

In practice, the demand is raised to evade the fundamental problem that faces the working class, which is how it is to organise to defend its interests. Through the trade unions, the SWP,

GET INVOLVED!

I joined the Miners Support Group because I was fed up seeing what goes on in this country (and around the world). I couldn't see the sense in throwing 30,000 miners on the dole for the short term gain of the City of London. I wanted to be in a broadly based group that didn't get bogged down in petty arguments and would also be open to all. The Miners Support Group seemed to fit the bill. Simon

There are already too many people unemployed. Scargill warned that would happen but not enough people listened to him. It is the coal miners today, it could be the fishermen tomorrow. John

From experience I have found that there is corruption in trade unions at all levels. The trade unions have lost touch with the ordinary workers' struggle. Often they totally ignore these struggles and actively discourage any militancy. I wanted to take stock of the political situation. I read 'New Worker', 'Socialist Worker', the 'Militant' - looking for a political perspective. I formulated the opinion that it has to be an active communist attitude that's taken. The only communist group that was active, vocal and prepared to go out onto the street was the RCG. Andy Duncan

I used to go to Labour Party Young Socialist meetings, but I was put off for ages. A little hierarchy told everyone else what they thought. There was nothing for discussion. Andy W

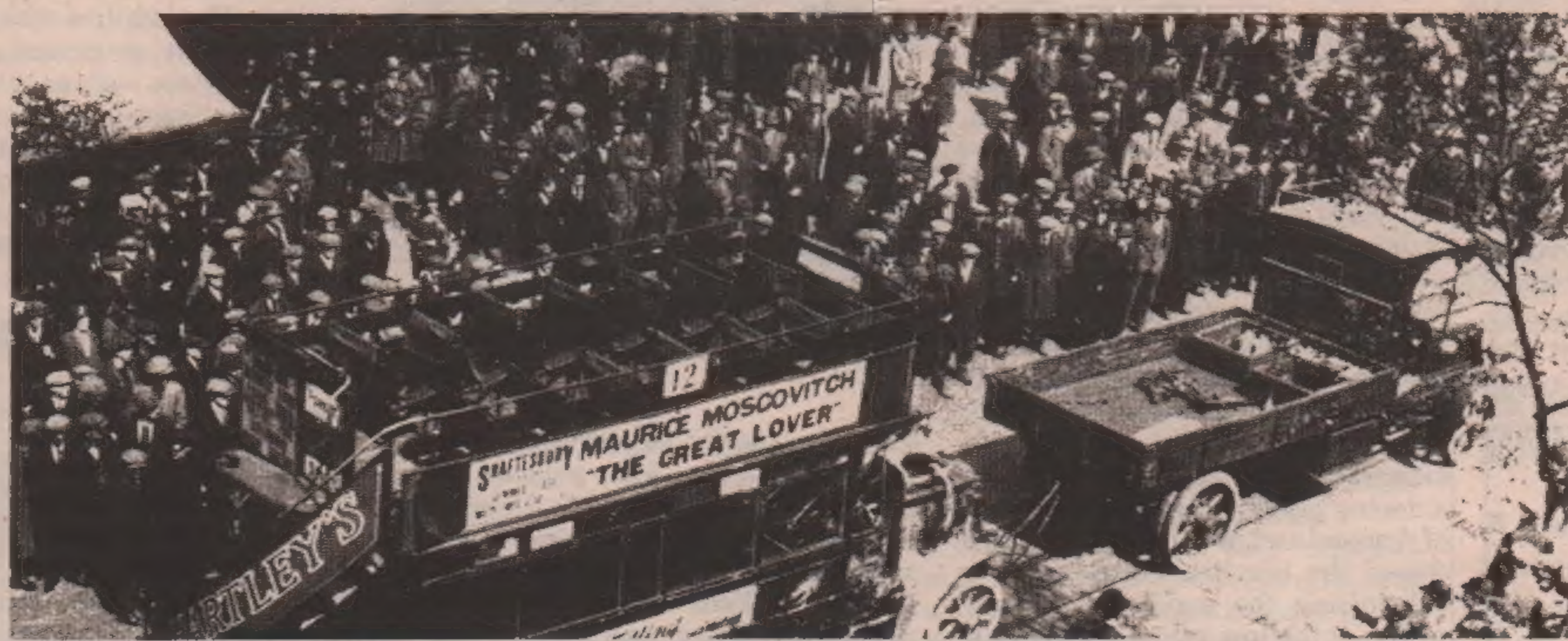
I came along the street one day and saw the banner of the Dundee Miners Support Group. Unemployment is something that I feel very strongly about. That's why I've been speaking at the rallies to say Fight Racism! Fight Unemployment! Fight the Pit Closures! Susan

I got involved not just to protect the miners' jobs. They are the tip of the unemployment iceberg. We must show the Tories that we're not going to sit back and take it. We should be going not just for 300,000 signatories but 3 million! Gregor

Marching for the miners

RCG members and supporters joined the hundreds of thousands who marched in support of the miners in London on 21 and 25 October. 270 copies of our book, *People versus State: the miners' strike 1984-85*, a graphic illustration of the treachery of the Labour Party and TUC, were sold. In Manchester, the RCG joined over 5,000 people demonstrating against pit closures on 17 November as part of the North West TUC's 'regional day of action'. Supporters of FRFI in the North West are involved in the local miners' support groups. In Bury, the group is organising a demonstration for 19 December, assembly 11.30am, Pyramid Park.

The slogan of the General Strike



1926: the strikers immobilised transport, but the Labour leaders were more than ready to sell-out the strike

Militant and the rest of the left argue. Yet the trade unions embrace a diminishing minority of the working class. In 1979, the membership of the TUC was just over 12 million, half the total workforce of 24 million. Now it is no more than 7.5 million and falling. Excluded from the left's 'organised labour movement' are the 4 million unemployed, the overwhelming majority of 5.5 million part-time workers, and overall three out of four women workers.

This Trade Union Movement, with the honourable exception of the NUM, has not conducted sustained resistance over the last 13 years. As Tom Mann found over a hundred

years ago, the unions are no longer 'fighting organisations of the working class'. Instead they are increasingly centralised and autocratic organisations representing the interests of a diminishing minority. Five unions (the T&G, GMB, AEU, EETPU, Unison and MSF) organise two-thirds of the membership of the TUC. The only circumstances in which this 'labour movement' would organise a general strike would be such as those that existed in 1926: that is, when it could be absolutely certain of its defeat. When the left argues that the TUC should 'get off its knees', it offers not a political strategy, but the illusion that this is a

possibility.

The 1984-85 miners' strike proved that trade union methods of struggle were no longer adequate. Hence Arthur Scargill and the NUM leadership completely supported the women's community groups, and called for the formation of support groups throughout the country. In this, they were far ahead of the rest of the left. The poll tax campaign also won not despite its lack of roots in the 'organised working class', but because of it. Such community-based organisations are crucial in dissolving the authority and control of the 'labour lieutenants of capital', which is why in 1992 the 'official movement' has taken the lead in setting up miners' support groups. It has decided that it is going to control the movement in order to quash it, and the left in calling for a general strike is signifying its refusal to mount any challenge to the process.

We support open, democratic community-based organisation as the basis for involving the working class as a whole - women, the unemployed, and part-time and temporary workers, the majority which the 'organised movement' deliberately excludes. We are not against trade unions - we too wish them to become 'fighting organisations of the working class'. But we recognise that this is dependent on the extent to which the working class as a whole becomes organised outside the 'official movement' and therefore against it. Hence when those such as Socialist Organisation declare 'We are beginning to have a labour movement once more', we see where the left has placed its marker - for the narrow, sectarian and exclusive interests of a tiny minority.

Robert Clough

COAL
NOT
DOLE

The real price of coal imports

Importing coal from Colombia has been encouraged by the Conservatives. It is cheaper than British coal because the workers are paid less and have fewer rights. Coal produced for the domestic market in Colombia uses child labour and workers do a 12 hour day. In government-directed mines workers get the minimum wage - about £64 a month; the rent for a basic flat is £60 a month. Coal for export is produced on larger mines, often leased to multinationals. Here workers, using modern technology with highly integrated production and distribution methods, earn up to £160 a month.

South African coal is also cheaper because of low pay and few rights for black workers. Their pay per tonne of coal produced is only one-fifth that of miners in the US and one-tenth that of German miners. Conditions are dreadful for workers, including those of the 300,000 migrant workers from Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. There were 603 fatal injuries and 9,103 non fatal injuries in 1991.

In September 1990, Dr Maurice King wrote in the medical journal *The Lancet* that children dehydrated from diarrhoea in the Third World should be denied medical treatment and left to die. Curing them was pointless, he argued, when there was not enough food to feed them. His view was supported by an editorial which observed that even if an atom bomb was dropped every day on the Third World, the rate of population growth meant that problems of malnutrition would recur.

So members of the British medical profession, who take the hypocritical oath to save life, would give up on the four million children who die from diarrhoeal diseases every year. The same arguments would condemn the 150 million children who suffer severe malnutrition. Their choice of imagery is horribly appropriate: the toll on human life from scarcity of water and food in the Third World is equivalent to a Hiroshima every three days. SARAH BOND examines the hunger trade.

The millions of deaths from hunger are needless. Our highly productive and scientifically advanced civilisation is quite able to sustain life for all human beings. In past periods the privileged minority could argue that they lacked the means to eliminate the hunger of the majority: not so now. Today amidst the scarcity abundance has never been so overflowing.

The problem is no longer food production itself but who controls it. That power lies with a handful of multinational corporations who determine what gets produced where and who gets to eat it. These companies' sole interest in food is not the life it supports but the profit it yields. It is they who have reaped the benefits of abundance, while the poor still suffer scarcity. This summer while famine in Somalia claimed 300,000 lives, the International Wheat Organisation announced a bumper harvest. Between 1950 and 1986, world grain production increased a massive 260 per cent, far out-pacing population growth. World grain production is currently sufficient to provide 3,000 calories per day to every human being, one and a half times their basic requirement of 2,000 calories per day. Yet 400 million people consume less than 80 per cent of this basic amount.

Meanwhile, the 20 per cent of the world's population which lives in the wealthy capitalist countries consumes over 50 per cent of the world's food. Here the average calorie consumption is 30-40 per cent more than the basic requirement, leading to obesity and related diseases. The processed food which makes such healthy profits for the food companies provides an unhealthy diet for the working class families who eat it. In the post-war period there has been a steady increase in new forms of malnutrition amongst the working class. It is the growth of the food monopolies that has caused this increase. Big business' control over food has become the key obstacle to solving the problems of hunger and malnutrition.

THE TOP UK 25

The top 100 food businesses, 25 are British. They include:

Unilever
 Rank Hovis McDougall
 Tate & Lyle
 Borden
 Hilldown Holdings
 United Biscuits
 Cadbury Schweppes
 Geest
 Associated British Foods
 Sims Food Group
 Borden
 Northern Foods
 Haziwood
 Unigate

Down on the farm

'If one attempted to feed the world's 4,000 million people on an American diet using US agricultural production technologies (assuming oil was the only energy source) all known petroleum reserves would be exhausted within eleven years.'

(Susan George, *Ill Fares the Land*)

Control the production of wheat and cereals and you have control over the lives or - probably more appropriate in this context - the deaths of the poor majority. Today US agriculture has that control, most of the world depending upon it for cereal imports. US cereal farming is the most productive in the world and has become so by the rapid concentration of its farmland and the replacement of labour with mechanisation. In 1900 there were 5.7 million farms in the USA, with an average acreage of 146. In 1975 there were 2.7 million on an average acreage of 404. By this time, 2,000 farms a week were going bankrupt: in 1979, 20 per cent of farms raised 80 per cent of all grain and animals; by 1986, the largest 6 per cent of farms controlled 60 per cent of the total value of crops produced.

The result is enormously intensive farming, which requires high inputs of machinery, fertilisers and pesticides: to create one job in US agriculture costs \$400,000 in capital investment. But its enormous productivity means its produce has fetched a cheaper price on the post-war market than any other country's. When the world grain trade increased 250 per cent between 1970 and 1980, the USA was able to capture 75 per cent of the new market.

Other farmers cannot possibly compete with this sort of production. In the oppressed nations, they are wiped out. For the rich countries who can afford it, protectionism is the only defence: all notions of a free market melt into the air. European agriculture has been protected by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Agreed in 1962, the CAP has restricted imports to Europe via levies, tariffs and quotas. In addition it has subsidised domestic production by guaranteeing prices to farmers regardless of demand and, when this policy produced the inevitable surpluses, by subsidising the export of the surpluses at the low prices necessary to compete with US produce.

Such a policy has meant higher prices for the consumer and unemployment for farm workers replaced by machinery: between 1960 and 1985, 1,300 farm jobs were lost every day in the EC. But for the big farmers, it has rewards. European farming has become increasingly productive, the average wheat yield rising 50 per cent between 1973 and 1985. These developments have seen the EC move with the USA and other capitalist countries from net-importers to net-exporters of food in the post-war period. And their exports share in the domination of world wheat production; in 1986-7, the USA produced 32 per cent, Canada 23 per cent, the EC 18 per cent and Australia 16 per cent.

The growth of monopolies: the death of the free market

'The food producer's monopoly exceeds the oil monopoly.'

US Assistant Secretary of State, 1974

In a rational world these sorts of advances in productivity would have wiped out hunger. But driven by profit, they have only increased the control of a small group of capitalists over world food. Today just five companies control 90 per cent of the whole of the world's wheat trade: Cargill (USA), Continental Grain (USA), Louis Dreyfus (France), Bunge (Brazil) and Andre-Garnac (Switzerland). The two US companies control more than 50 per cent. The biggest, Cargill, is a private company run by two families. In 1986 its sales were \$32.3 billion and its assets



\$11.1bn. It is the largest single contributor to the US balance of payments. It operates in 36 different countries through its Geneva based subsidiary, Tradax. It has offices in Manila, Tokyo, Panama, Buenos Aires, Amsterdam and London and employs 46,000 people. It owns 500 barges, 5,000 rail trucks and 14 ocean-going vessels. Former US Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland said its intelligence apparatus on world agriculture was more effective than the CIA's.

These sorts of monopolies exist not just in cereal but in almost every other area of food production, including 'agribusiness' which supplies the necessary inputs. 25 per cent of the trade in pesticides is controlled by three companies: Bayer (Germany), Ciba-Geigy (Switzerland) and Monsanto (USA); 80 per cent of the trade in bananas is also controlled by three companies and so is 83 per cent of the cocoa trade. Four companies control 90 per cent of the tea trade.

Many of these companies practise 'vertical integration', moving into all aspects of production from the supply of the seeds and inputs to the processing and marketing of the products. As the Chairman of Del Monte put it, 'We literally begin with the seed and end at the grocer's shelf'. Cargill has expanded into beef slaughter and packing in Canada, oilseed processing in Asia, poultry and pet-food processing in South America and seed research in South Africa. Many of them have turnovers that dwarf the economies of the poor countries in which they operate. A decade before the Bhopal tragedy, the company responsible - Union Carbide - was selling its products in 125 countries, 75 of which had smaller economies than the corporation. Such companies can shift operations at will to more profitable sites: the Philippines became the world's largest pineapple exporter after workers in Hawaii became unionised; US company Dole found it could pay workers in the Philippines 10-15c an hour so it sacked its 6,000 US workers and moved there.

Big corporations also monopolise the extremely profitable business of processed food. This area of the food industry has really grown up with the monopolies in the post-war period. Today in the USA 1,200 new products appear on the supermarket shelves every month. Because these products are all just slightly different processed versions of the same basic foods, massive sums must be spent on their advertising to convince shoppers they want them. Only those companies which can afford such sums can survive. So most well-known brand names are owned by just two or three companies. Recognise these? PG Tips, Brooke Bond, Lipton, Bachelors, John West, Wall's, Mottsons, Birds Eye, Flora, Krona, Stork, Blue Band. The Anglo-Dutch giant Unilever owns them all. Unilever is the biggest advertiser in the world. In 1989, it bought 55 businesses costing £3 billion. Its chair, Sir Michael Angus, said the following year that the company was acquiring 'something like three businesses a month around the world'.

The big bonus of food processing is the price mark-up. Farmers see the raw produce bought from them for a tiny sum and then hundreds of per cent added to the final price: cheap maize becomes expensive cornflakes. As the business magazine *Fortune* observes: 'The evidence shows an industry competitive in every respect but price'. The families who live on these companies' processed rubbish suffer high prices and, as numerous health studies have noted, low nutrition. But the companies make a mint. Unilever has around 500 operating groups in 75 countries. Its sales in 1991 were over £23 billion, its profits nearly £2 billion.

David v Goliath: the food companies in the oppressed nations

'This is one hell of a profitable business.'

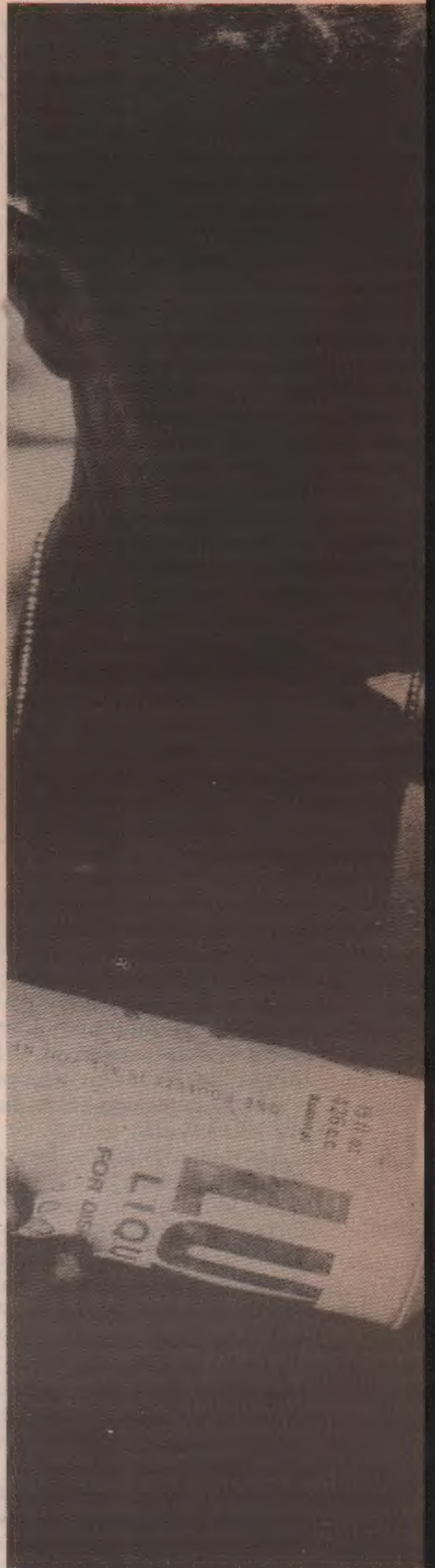
(US agribusiness executive, *Business Week*, 13 January 1975)

If the small capitalist in the industrialised countries cannot withstand the might of these monopolies, what chance has the poor peasant of Africa and Asia? In the post-war period, as the monopolies have gained strength, they have turned the food trade balance of the oppressed nations from a surplus of nearly \$6 billion in 1961 to a deficit of around \$2 billion in 1984. Their domestic production destroyed, these countries have no alternative but to import food from the multinationals which only a minority can afford.

What agriculture remains must be aimed almost solely at the export market, to earn hard currency to pay for the imports. Today the top exports from the Third World are: coffee; tropical fruits, vegetables and nuts; animal feeds; wood; cocoa. And who dominates the export market? The

HARVE HUN

BIG BUSIN THE FOO



STING GER

NESS AND D TRADE



same multinationals who control the imports. The governments of the capitalist countries also impose tariffs to prevent anyone but the multinationals processing the raw produce. Raw soya beans from Latin America and Asia, imported to Europe mainly for animal fodder, have no tariff imposed, whereas soymeal has a 7 per cent levy and soya margarine 25 per cent. While fresh pineapples have a 9 per cent tariff, canned pineapples have 32 per cent slapped on and pineapple juice 42 per cent.

This subordination of agriculture in the oppressed nations to the needs of the rich is of course nothing new. Colonisation paved the way for the multinationals, wiping out the indigenous methods of food production in Africa and Asia. Trading companies like Britain's East India Company organised their own armies to secure their conquests. One historian describes how in the Congo, these companies, 'mercilessly crushing the old African agrarian system... proceeded to make gigantic expropriations, seizing millions of hectares, burning villages, tracking down the population far from rivers, displacing and deporting them, forcing them to gather plantation crops at gun-point.'

Some of the food giants owe their very existence to such plunder and destruction. In 1911 Unilever's founder William H Lever acquired 750,000 hectares of palm-bearing land in the Congo, naming it Leverville. He wrote of the African on whose labour his wealth was to be built, 'He is a child and a willing child but he wants training and handling with patience'.

Other companies benefit from the subordination which in many cases has survived independence. For example, ex-colonies are relied upon for Europe's supplies of bananas: Britain, via the Anglo-Dutch company Geest, gets its supplies from the Windward Islands, Italy's come from Somalia; France's come from the Cameroon, the Ivory Coast and the French Caribbean. Around 15 per cent of the value of these products goes to the countries that produce them. The rest goes to make up profits of the multinationals - which in Geest's case were £26 million last year.

The banana crop which Geest buys from the Windward Islands (St Lucia, Dominica, St Vincent and Granada) is their main source of jobs and income. Yet it is now under threat from the EC's 1992 free market agreement, which would lift import quotas on cheaper bananas from Central America. Geest's chief executive David Sugden describes as 'unthinkable' the consequences of any departure from Europe's 'legal and moral commitments' to its traditional banana producers. But just in case, Geest has bought 3,000 hectares of land in Costa Rica, investing £46 million to develop new plantations. In 1991 Geest's turnover was nearly twice the total 1987 gross national product for all the Windward Islands put together.

The oppressed nations simply have not the means to fight such economic might. They cannot afford the investment necessary to compete with the cheap produce exported by the food companies, who have price-subsidies and food-aid as levers to prise open reluctant markets. Even tariffs to protect domestic produce are too expensive for these debt-ridden economies. Nigeria, one of the wealthier African states, has put up trade barriers to try and break from a dependence on US wheat imports which cost it \$2 billion in 1984. But local produce costs two and a half times more than imports, and with pressure on from the USA and the banks it is probably only a question of time before the barriers come down.

On the other hand crops for export can be profitable - a Mexican farmer can earn 20 times more producing tomatoes for the US market than he

can growing food for Mexicans. So governments and big farmers act as pimps, profiteering from the sale of their land and their people. A prime example is found in Costa Rica. A third of the Costa Rican rainforest has been cut for cattle-grazing since 1960. As a result, beef exports soared 7-fold. But intake per Cost Rican of beef fell by 50 per cent to less than a cat eats in the USA.

Costa Rica is also one of the world's main banana exporters. Banana plantations now cover 33,000 hectares of land. These plantations replace rainforest with what is known as green desert: they use more than 3,000 tonnes of pesticides annually, which kills off all plant life except the banana crop. In July 1990, half a million fish were found floating belly up in the Marina River, poisoned by the phosphate which is used in large quantities on the plantations. And a lawsuit has been brought against the Standard Fruit Company and the petro-chemical multi-nationals Shell and Dow after 3,000 plantation workers were sterilised by the pesticide DBCP.

Where there has been any development of agriculture it has only served to strengthen the position of the multinationals. The Green Revolution, for example, was heralded as the answer to world food problems. Introduced first in Mexico by the US Rockefeller Foundation, it brought new strains of crops to a select group of countries, including Brazil, India, Turkey and Argentina. These crops were new high yield variety which it was claimed would enormously increase crop yields. And this they did. But they also enormously increased these countries' dependence upon imports of technology. As Rockefeller consultant Lester Brown open-



ly admitted: 'The multinational corporation has a vested interest in the agricultural revolution'. In 1973, Massey-Ferguson announced that tractor sales were up 80 per cent in Argentina.

Supplying such inputs has been kept the sole preserve of the multinationals. India was developing a domestic fertiliser industry until the famine of 1965-6 made it dependent on US food shipments. Suddenly an end to the food imports was threatened: the conditions for their resumption? Mainly that India allow greater freedom for US investment, particularly in its fertiliser industry.

Let them eat Coke

'... feeding the hungry will be an important part of our business strategy in the future... Of course we expect that we will obtain a return in an exchange for our efforts.'

(Helmut Maucher, head of Nestlé)

It is their activities in the oppressed nations that bring the food corporations their biggest profits. In 1983, while returns on Unilever's investments in the EC were 9 per cent and in North America 14 per cent, in Africa they were 27 per cent and in South America 54 per cent. But for the poor, these hunger merchants reap nothing but misery and suffering.

The weather may bring drought, but it is the multinationals that cause famine. In Africa's 1984 drought, Zimbabwe and Kenya depended upon maize imports to feed their populations, which the poor could not afford: meanwhile, Zimbabwe announced record harvests of tobacco, soya beans and cotton for export; and while their children starved, Kenyan peasants had to export strawberries and asparagus to Europe. The same is true of the current drought in southern Africa.

The control of the multinationals also drives the poor off the land. The same concentration of agriculture which drove out the small farmers in the capitalist countries has, in the oppressed nations, dispossessed thousands of poor farmers, who make up the majority of the population. The Green Revolution has served only to concentrate more land in the hands of fewer big landowners. In India, 47 per cent of rural dwellers now own less than one acre of land: 22 per cent own none at all. In Latin America, 93 per cent of farmland is owned by 7 per cent of the population. In South Africa, 85 per cent of the population was designated the worst 14 per cent of the land. 800 million rural-dwellers in these countries have no land at all. Every day, thousands leave the land to join the sprawling shanty towns that house the urban poor.

And the multinationals' control of food causes disastrous changes in the already inadequate diets of the poor. In Mexico Coca-Cola is seen as a health drink and the family will go without food to buy it for the father. In the shanty towns around Lima, many poor Peruvians live exclusively on a substance called Nicoveta, produced for export to feed chickens. Processed from fishmeal in filthy conditions, it is partly responsible for the local infant mortality rate of 50 per cent.

In Africa Nestlé has created a new syndrome of infant malnutrition, through the sales of its baby food. Dressing up saleswomen as nurses, it sent them round maternity wards to persuade mothers to give up breastfeeding. The consequence was that poor families spent up to half their income on formula food for their babies, which they eked out by over-diluting it with unsafe water in unsterile bottles. A large number of babies inevitably died from the diarrhoea this caused. A boycott forced Nestlé to stop using the nurses' gimmick, but it still gives out free packs of the formula to discourage breastfeeding. And now it is developing a new product to sell to mothers as a cure for the diarrhoea its despicable practices have helped to cause.

The revelations of such criminal acts, such blatant profiteering should condemn these organisations to ignominy and ruin. The men who run them should be reviled as the epitome of all that is most loathsome in society. No moneylender after his pound of flesh, no vulture picking over the bones of the dying can practise a more deadly parasitism than they. Yet they occupy positions of power and respectability. William Lever was honoured for his activities no less than three times: he was made a baronet in 1911, a baron in 1917 and a viscount in 1922. Today his grandson Lord Leverhulme is one of Britain's biggest landowners, with 99,000 acres.

And governments kow-tow to their interests. As Carla Hill, US GATT negotiator, put it to a Senate committee, 'Think of me as the US Trade Representative with a crowbar...'

HAMBURGERS FROM HUNGARY

Socialism in eastern Europe was able to keep out the food giants and feed the people. With its collapse, the multinationals are moving in.

In Hungary factories and land have been bought up by food companies such as Unilever, Tate & Lyle and Phillip Morris of the USA. According to the *Financial Times*, farms are being relieved of 'their social obligations to local villages'. Cereal production is being reduced and replaced by export crops such as sugar, peas and soft fruits. Babolna State Farm, described as 'a flagship of Hungarian agriculture', is now running a joint venture with US company Arbor Acres to supply beef and chicken hamburgers for McDonalds.

prying open markets, keeping them open so that our private sector can take advantage of them'. As for the victims, some doctor can always be found to argue that their deaths are inevitable, because they breed too much.

We must declare that it should be the vultures of the food business, not their victims, which have no place on

'And now it is developing a new product to sell to mothers as a cure for the diarrhoea its despicable practices helped to cause.'

this earth. This is not a question of charity: here, in the imperialist countries which have spawned them, the food companies are also malnourishing the poor. This problem can only increase as the economic crisis deepens. It is in the interests of the working class in these countries, as well as the poor masses in the rest of the world, that we expose the profit-hungry barons of the food business.



WHAT ABOUT THE WORKERS?

■ Cargill broke a year-long strike by workers at its New York State salt mines in April 1987.

■ Cargill also precipitated a strike to break the union at its soya bean crushing plant in Liverpool, England in 1986.

■ Unilever's Indian subsidiary Hindustan Lever sacked contract workers in 1987 after they formed a union and won a court ruling that they should receive India's minimum wage

■ Unilever subsidiary Brooke Bond markets much of the tea produced in Sri Lanka. Tamil tea plantation workers, most of whom are women, are paid 50p a day. Last year, Unilever's chairman Sir Michael Angus, received a salary of £690,000 - over £2,600 a day.

'This Assembly is taking place in crucial and definitive times. Now, as 500 years ago, we are faced with attempts to remake the world and establish a different order of relations among states. Today as yesterday, we must determine whether the future will allow human solidarity to flourish, or whether it will be riddled with selfishness; whether it will lead to the eventual emancipation of the dispossessed, or will perpetuate their tragedy forever; whether we are embarking on another colonialist adventure, or whether hope will finally open its arms to the poor of this earth.

In the same way that the existence of the cold war did nothing to change the Third World's fortune, its disappearance is showing no signs of benefiting the Third World's peoples... There is nothing that allows us to imagine that the present circumstances of unipolarity and hegemony will produce more favourable effects for our peoples. On the contrary, we are presented with even greater dangers, given the triumphal bravado of those who at once possess the greatest military power, insuperable historical ignorance, and the crassest moral insensitivity.

If there really does exist a spirit of international cooperation and if the cold war has really ended, why don't the great powers drastically reduce their military spending and channel these freed resources toward the development of underdeveloped countries? How can it be explained that now, of all times, there is an attempt to relegate international development cooperation to an even lower and more hypothetical level, to limit even more the United Nations' already diminished participation in it, and to furthermore establish unacceptable conditions and restrictions on development?

For the majority of the planet's inhabitants, the mutations of relations between the countries of the North mean nothing. If there is some desire for them to become significant to them, resolute and effective action against the hunger and poverty that flagellate hundreds of millions of people in the Third World must be undertaken. There must be action against children's malnutrition and the curable diseases that kill thousands of children each day in a permanent and silent war that some prefer to ignore.

The economic crisis, the Third World's foreign debt—which has already reached \$1.5 trillion—unequal terms of trade, growing hunger and misery for the immense majority of humanity's peoples are more serious than ever, its consequences shake even the most solid of the world's economies. Revealed subsidies and other selfish policies threaten to block agreements that have been reached for years to regulate international trade, and could provoke a disastrous confrontation between the great economic powers. This demonstrates that the history of capitalism cannot escape its terrible self-destructive laws.

Each day the intention of those who plot the reorganisation of the world, in order to dominate it, becomes clearer. They would preserve for the people of the South—that is three quarters of humanity—a permanent state of underdevelopment and poverty that forces them to continue providing the wealth for the well-fed minorities of the North. The international agencies would be converted into mechanisms of domination and interference to ensure a world system where the powerful nations would impose their corrupt concepts and values. The new conquistadors no longer bear the cross; instead, they brandish only the sword and purse and their only gospel is their lust for profit.

They claim cynically to be exponents of a better society and go to the extreme of trying to claim the monopoly on democracy, liberty and human rights.

Capitalism: a bitter, sad and endless nightmare

We reprint below an edited version of a speech given by Ricardo Alarcon, Cuba's Foreign Minister at the 47th Session of the UN General Assembly (see *Granma*, 11 October 1992). This lucid indictment of capitalism and defence of socialism comes at an appropriate time. With Bill Clinton's election to the US Presidency, the imperialist attempt to destroy Cuba, a bastion of socialism and harbinger of hope for the poor, will intensify. The defence of Cuba is an urgent democratic and socialist task. This speech shows why.



Young Cubans celebrate their Revolution

Today's hegemonic forces boast of the supposed superiority of their societies, way of life, ideas, beliefs and values and try to impose them at all costs on other peoples, with the same arrogance as their colonial ancestors and their fascist mentors.

It is not only their ideas they want to impose, but also their 'justice' which lacks the slightest fairness and which within the United States itself imposes the worst sanctions, including the death penalty, almost exclusively on blacks and Hispanics, with frankly racist criteria. What sense has the US Supreme Court's decision legalising the right to kidnap anyone of any nationality anywhere in the world, and how can it be tolerated? Has humanity ever known such highhandedness and abuse of power at any other time in history?

Encouraged by the setbacks of European socialism, they are attempting to decree an end to socialist ideas and impose capitalism in its most uncontrolled form, as the only, definitive and permanent model throughout the world. They proclaim so-called neoliberal formulas like dogma to be obeyed by all and present them, without even blinking an eye, as the only recipe for the happiness and prosperity of humankind.

Many millions of dollars that could be used for nobler ends are being spent on selling these ideas. The peoples of the Third World have not forgotten that it was precisely the insatiable voracity of capitalism that condemned them to a long and difficult colonial experience, that crushed them with racism and discrimination, and submitted them to the backwardness and misery that continues to plague them. Capitalism is

and has always been the main cause of our peoples' ills, and will never be able to solve them.

The euphoric promoters of so-called neoliberalism are overflowing with joy at the bankruptcy of certain socialist projects which, as is known, barely lasted a few decades, were tried out under adverse conditions and in relatively less developed countries.

Those who are so elated by the failures of certain socialist societies should be able to prove that capitalism solves humanity's problems, or at least has solved them somewhere. After all, it is the system that has predominated throughout the world for centuries, and has only completely developed certain of the richest countries.

After more than 200 years of capitalism in a rich, developed, powerful country like the United States, the US population still lacks a health system, and millions are demanding jobs, housing, education and protection in their old age, or suffer the effects of drug addiction, violence and other social scourges. Tens of millions of people are the victims of racism and racial discrimination in their worst forms. The most powerful of countries has not been able to solve any of these problems with capitalism, despite 200 years of development, despite its own vast resources and its shameless exploitation of other nations over that prolonged period.

Some turncoats can kneel before this calf of fool's gold. But in order to understand the failure of capitalism as a social project, one doesn't have to read Karl Marx. It is enough to take a walk through the ghettos of New York

or Los Angeles. The American Dream might dazzle a few weak minds, but for a large and growing sector of that country, especially millions of African-Americans, Latinos, native Americans and Asian-Americans, for the unemployed, poor and homeless, that dream has been and continues to be a bitter, sad and endless nightmare.

How is it morally possible to present as the universal archetype profoundly unjust societies where unrestrained consumerism, and a plethora of insolent minorities, exist side by side with many who suffer a life as miserable as that of the poorest people in Third World countries? In terms of human solidarity, those societies have nothing to teach us, and much to learn from us.

The truth is that the kind of society they want to impose is not only intrinsically unjust and inhumane, but also threatens the survival of the human species and life itself on our planet. The irrational consumerism of the rich exhausts nonrenewable resources, poisons seas and rivers, makes the air in cities unbreathable, adversely affects the weather, dangerously increases the sea-level, does irreparable damage to the soil, ravages forests and extends desertification, increasing the misery of hundreds of millions of human beings. The environment is also the victim of an endless war that has already caused the death of many different species and endangers many others. When will it be humanity's turn to disappear, a victim of its own senseless behaviour? How long will we continue to pay homage to a lifestyle that condemns us all, without exception, to extinction?

I am addressing this Assembly at an extraordinarily difficult time for Cuba. The economic, commercial and financial blockade the United States imposed on the Cuban people has now lasted more than 30 years and today it is intensifying and widening.

While speaking hypocritically of peace and international cooperation, Washington bans the entry into US ports of foreign vessels involved in any kind of trade with Cuba, seeks to oblige companies based in other countries to observe its anti-Cuba policy and thus grossly violates not only the most elemental rights of my people but also the sovereignty of other countries and the fundamental principles and norms of international order.

The United States pursues Cuban economic and commercial activities throughout the world; it tries to prevent us from acquiring fuel, food and medical supplies; it pressurises investors and business people; on more than one occasion it has managed to intimidate others and frustrate entirely legitimate operations in its obstinate and criminal determination to starve our people into submission.

Never before has a people been attacked in such a severe, protracted and absolute manner in peacetime.

What they are attacking is a small, poor country with little territory, very limited natural resources, lacking in important energy sources, whose chances of development are forever linked to foreign trade, which receives no credit or financial backing from international organisations, and is even limited to certain types of humanitarian aid, and now they want to prevent us from trading.

The blockade is being intensified just as Cuba is going through an extremely difficult economic situation owing to the dissolution of the socialist bloc, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the abrupt and radical changes in its relations with those countries with which it conducted 80 per cent of its trade, and the abrupt elimination of the equitable and fair prices under which these relationships took place. This represents for Cuba a loss of 70 per cent of its purchasing power, which fell from \$8.14bn in 1989 to \$2.2bn this year. In fact Cuba is faced with a double blockade which every day becomes tighter and more relentless.

Today we are facing situations that are extremely critical and cause enormous damage to our economy with inevitable repercussions on people's living standards, on consumption levels, on our production plans and on the country's development. Given these difficult conditions, the imperialists hope that if they make the blockade harsher and more oppressive, they can bring about conditions of such misery and hunger that our people will surrender.

But this is hope born of stupidity. Whosoever seeks to annihilate us is ignorant of the fact that Cuba's principal resource, its only true wealth, is its people.

Those who think we they can bring Cuba to its knees are mistaken. Our people have travelled a long road to arrive at their total emancipation.

We can also count on the solidarity of other peoples. We know that the oppressed, the exploited, the victims of discrimination are numerous in this world and they are placing their hopes in Cuba's survival.

We shall continue to resist for the sake of our dead and for those who hope for a better life. We shall not betray the mandate of our forebears nor the trust of the peoples. We shall be capable of resisting and we shall resist.

We shall continue to fulfil our most sacred duty: saving the country, the Revolution and socialism. On their behalf we shall continue with our struggle, without vacillating, facing all obstacles, however harsh and difficult the situation may be, ever onward to victory.

Apartheid out of Britain



On 1 November, after more than twenty years of sporting isolation, the South African Springbok rugby team slunk into Britain, across the Channel from France. They were anxious to avoid Heathrow Airport where demonstrators from the Springbok Reception Committee and the press were awaiting their arrival. As a team their credentials as either good rugby players or politically reformed representatives of the 'new' South Africa were certainly in doubt. They were not, however, without friends who were more than ready to cover up for the racist team: the Rugby Football Union which invited them in order to make money; the police more than ready to stop disruption; the press who thought bygones ought to be bygones and the British Anti-Apartheid Movement as anxious as anyone to demobilise protests. CAROL BRICKLEY and RICHARD ROQUES analyse the events.

The Springbok Reception Committee was launched on 7 October by City of London Anti-Apartheid Group to protest against the tour. The RCG affiliated immediately. Messages of support were received from the PAC, AZAPO, BCMA, SACOS - the non-racial South African sporting body, the SACOS Rugby Union, the South African Amateur Athletics Board, the National Professional Soccer League, the New Unity Movement and the University of Western Cape Rugby Club. What was clear from these messages was that the so-called united South African Rugby Football Union (SARFU) was already under strong criticism for failing to honour its promises to develop the sport in black areas in exchange for permission from the ANC to participate in international tours. There was no doubt for us, however, that there could be no normal sport in an abnormal society. Any moves towards united non-racial sport have been purely cosmetic in the context of the state-sponsored violence and terror that reigns in the townships.

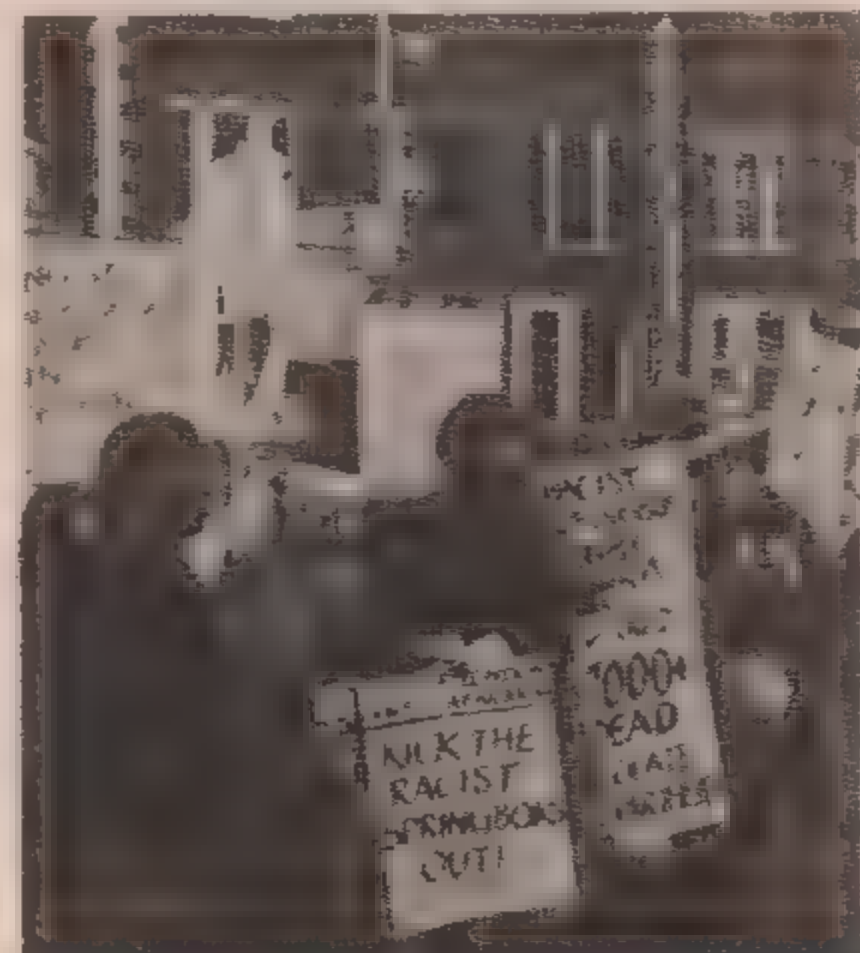
City of London Anti-Apartheid Group made it clear to the ANC in February 1992 that it would continue the sports boycott despite the fact that the ANC (alone among the liberation movements) was busy dismantling it. Money could be thrown at the problem via the new ANC-approved sporting bodies and this might finance a few black sporting talents. What it would not do would be to make any inroads into the fundamentals of apartheid. Millions of black children who attend overcrowded, underfunded, segregated schools with no sports facilities, malnourished by poverty, would not benefit from the new boom in sports administration.

The evidence was there for anyone who cared to look. The touring party of 38 was composed of 37 people from the old white South African Rugby Board; the token black (an assistant manager) announced while the team was touring France that unification only benefited the whites: 'Somewhere in my heart, I still have the feeling that I took the wrong deci-

sion'. The all-white team was chosen from the six elite white provincial unions and plans are afoot to refurbish their already lavish stadiums from the tour profits.

The team had already undermined its non-racial credentials by defying an ANC request for one minute's silence to honour victims of political violence at the start of the international against New Zealand's All Blacks in August. Instead the team and their racist supporters sang *Die Stem*, the white supremacist anthem.

The press in Britain were more than happy to ignore the realities. And the AAM was busy pretending nothing was happening until the National Olympic and Sports Congress (NOSC) - the ANC's sporting organisation formed to oppose SACOS and to dismantle sanctions - held a con-



ference on the weekend of 24/25 October where the grassroots insisted that approval for the Springbok tour be withdrawn. The Springboks were already touring France and gaining a well-deserved reputation for Boerish behaviour, including snubbing a dinner hosted by their victorious opponents and bellowing *Die Stem* in the hotel lobby. The Born-Again team captain Naas Botha said they had the right to sing what they liked.

The NOSC decision to withdraw support, backed initially by the ANC, brought the AAM leadership out of its torpor. Peter Hain demanded the tour be cancelled. Mike Terry, AAM's executive secretary, promised protests

reminiscent of the 'Stop the 70s Tour' campaign (which the AAM had tried to stop). One day later it was 'all change'. Whilst the ANC would not go so far as to support the tour, it was even more opposed to any demonstrations. Mouthpiece Steve Tshwete argued that it was 'too late' to stop the tour and urged local councils and the Anti-Apartheid Movement to do nothing that would disrupt it.

This was the green light for the AAM leadership to take up its more familiar position of condemning those who do anything. Archbishop Huddleston led the way saying City AA 'have always been an embarrassment, they are nothing to do with us.' Peter Hain, poised to lead the protests two days earlier, became busy in his constituency. The *Morning Star*, always ready to toe a line, called for mass disruption to oppose apartheid's representatives and then woke up to the fact that the ANC was engaged in 'tricky negotiations'. Anyone who protested in these circumstances would be substituting themselves for the ANC leadership, 'colonial style'. For all these apologists, apartheid magically disappeared.

So on 1 November the team sneaked into Britain by the back door with the full support of the AAM. The British press covered the incidents France claiming that *Die Stem* was only sung in private. There was one hotel lobby however where the Springboks did not get the chance to sing, only to run. Tracked down to the RFU's country club in Teddington on the day of their arrival, team members were pelted with eggs, flour and stinkbombs by Committee supporters. Even this was played down with *The Guardian* and *Independent* repeating claims that only Club staff were hit. These hacks weren't so happy when no members of the team attended the press conference the next day and only two players performed on the practice ground to be photographed. We deserved better they said, having spent many more years supporting apartheid than opposing it. This was a far worse slight than anything that might be going on in South Africa.

The Springbok Reception Committee stuck to its position knowing full well that the AAM had done a great deal to sabotage any opposition. Groups of supporters in Leicester, Bristol and Leeds were ready, however, to continue the protests. When nine supporters of the Campaign were arrested in Leicester, held for 37 hours and then charged with going equipped to commit criminal damage to Leicester Football Ground, the AAM renewed its attack in a press statement it has since refused to let City AA see. Published in *The Independent*, AAM Chairman Robert Hughes MP and the ever-keen Archbishop said: 'We regard as misguided and counter-productive the activities of those who have declared their intention to disrupt the tour. Whatever their motives, by acting contrary to the explicit appeals of the ANC and the non-racial sports movement, they run the risk of doing as much harm to non-racial sport and the cause of democracy as the tour itself.' Incidentally, unless the AAM has declared that Steve Tshwete alone embodies the 'non-racial sports movement', there have in fact been no such appeals.

For City AA and the RCG, the AAM's stance has the ring of familiarity. In 1984 when City AA defied the police ban on demonstrations outside the South African Embassy, the AAM was equally vociferous in publicly condemning the demonstrators when five of them were in prison. The AAM opposed the four-year long non stop picket outside the South African Embassy, even though the ANC, years later, offered congratulations for a magnificent campaign. Incidentally the AAM did not rush to follow suit on that occasion. Nor did the Archbishop... Nor did the *Morning Star*.

What was transparently obvious to everyone who attended the matches was how the tour was used to mobilise racist support for the Springbok team. At every match hundreds of racists, thousands at Twickenham waved South African flags and hurled racist abuse. At Twickenham British racists, flying the AWB flag, attacked the demonstration. This was no accident. The Springboks represent white supremacy. At the Leicester match once again they sang *Die Stem*.

The AAM did hold a demonstration at Twickenham against the presence of de Klerk. Having demobilised their support, they managed a dismal and silent procession of 26 people past the ground, and left before the match started. Clive Nelson, AAM strategist, argued that no protesters should be there - 'it should be a real boycott'. Around him racists hurled abuse and the most hated symbols of apartheid were unfurled.

Whatever else it may claim, the AAM is no longer an anti-apartheid movement. It is an ANC support group. The leadership has made several abortive attempts to close down the movement over the last few years and substitute 'Post Apartheid Solidarity' only to be overtaken by the realities of apartheid, like massacres. ■

SOUTH AFRICAN REVOLUTION In the balance

This new RCG pamphlet brings together articles analysing the current stage of the South African liberation struggle from a communist perspective and interviews with the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania that have appeared in *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* over the last three years. Available from Larkin Publications, BCM Box 5909, London WC1N 3XX price £2.

Copies will also be on sale at our meeting
**SOUTH AFRICAN REVOLUTION
IN THE BALANCE**
Sunday 6 December, 2pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1
Holborn tube £1/50p
Speaker: Carol Brickley
(FRFI Editorial Board, Convenor City AA)

ON THE TRAIL OF THE SPRINGBOKS

A HOSTILE RECEPTION

The Springbok Reception Campaign hounded the South African team throughout the racist tour. The team dodged a demonstration at Heathrow on 1 November, only to be pelted with eggs, flour and stinkbombs as they arrived at their hotel in Teddington that night.

LEICESTER

The protests which greeted the first match played by the Springboks in Britain in 23 years were organised by Leicester Trades Council, Leicester AA and City AA (in spite of warnings from the AAM that this was a 'grey area'), and a noisy, colourful demonstration outside the grounds left the racists in no doubt as to our opposition to the tour. The night before, the Springboks' coach and the gates of Leicester Football Ground were painted with anti-apartheid slogans.

BRISTOL

On 7 November, we picketed the match with huge reversible placards reading 'Springboks out!' and 'Sanctions now!'. The AAM turned up not to oppose the tour but to call for more 'integrated sport', and to embrace an official of the Springbok rugby team. They had asked Bristol police to separate them from City AA; however, a number of people including SACOS members and college students, came to join us.

LEEDS

In Leeds, the RCG mobilised locally against the 10 November match, attracting widespread support. The evening of the match, a picket was held outside the main entrance of Elland Road ground. Angry racists attending the match tried to get the picket moved on; meanwhile the police posed for photos holding South African flags.

TWICKENHAM

The picket of the Springbok-England match, [dis]graced by apartheid PR side de Klerk, saw the forces of reaction and fascism out in force. Drunken, abusive Boers, flaunting South African flags and scarves and, in one case, a naked bottom, were joined by British fascists carrying AWB flags. Picketers, including PAC, SACOS and BCMA members, defied the racists and the rain with chants of 'Racist Springboks Out'. AAM members held a tiny, brief and shabby little protest up the road against de Klerk's presence, and refused to join City AA.

DEFEND THE SPRINGBOK 10

The night before the Leicester match, 9 supporters of the Springbok Reception Committee, including RCG members and supporters, were arrested by Leicester police and charged with going equipped with tacks and broken glass to commit criminal damage to Leicester football ground. We were held for 37 hours, and threatened with remand in custody before being released on punitive bail conditions. These effectively banned us from demonstrating against any of the subsequent matches; undeterred, some defendants turned up anyway to protest at Twickenham.

Barely two days after our release, on the day of the 7 November Bristol match, we were again targeted by police while picketing South African Airways in London, resulting in one brutal arrest under the Public Order Act, and a Highway Obstruction charge.

This harassment of anti-Springbok protestors is a measure of the lengths the British state will go to to prevent any opposition to its support for the apartheid regime and its racist rugby team; the AAM's denunciation of our anti-tour protests allowed the police to attack us with impunity. The Springboks have left, but the campaign against British imperialism's support for apartheid will continue: we will only be able to defend ourselves against all those who attack us if we start now by defending the Springbok 10.

Support the Springbok 10!

Leicester Magistrates Court, 10am, Thursday 3 December (Criminal damage)
Great Marlborough Street Magistrates Court, London, 2.15pm, Monday 7 December (Public Order Act, Highway Obstruction)

Cat Wiener

LAW AND ORDER

It is not headline news, but a Royal Commission is currently meeting to review the Criminal Justice System. Its remit is to examine the investigative, pre-trial, trial and appeal systems and to make recommendations. On past experience, CAROL BRICKLEY argues, we should be wary both of the debate and the eventual proposals.



degree the balance was achieved may be judged by the response of the Police Federation magazine *Police* which headlined: 'Nice One Cyril!' (Sir Cyril Philips chaired the Commission). Police lobbying had been very successful, and they weren't going to stop there.

The Thatcher government seized on the report's recommendations to deal with paroxysms in the law and order lobby following the 1981 inner city uprisings. Lord Scarman's report on Brixton, although mealy-mouthed in some respects, had issued stern criticisms of police saturation operations like Swamp '81 and of lack of accountability. In response, the police launched a public campaign, in league with the press and Tory MPs, to point the finger at black people and create panic about street crime. One Tory MP, Alan Clark, claimed in Parliament that 'these offences are becoming increasingly brazen with gangs of up to 50 young blacks looting in broad daylight.' (Clark's talent for being economical with the truth has since taken him in a different direction). The police called a timely press conference to issue racial statistics for 'mugging' (a crime which does not exist in law) and began a £30,000 advertising campaign calling for capital punishment. The message was clear - more police powers or Britain will descend into crime and anarchy.

Whitelaw, then Home Secretary, obliged with promises of legislation to include stop and search, search of premises without warrant, roadblocks, extended custody powers and limitations on eligibility for jury service which would have excluded millions of people on the grounds that they had committed an imprisonable offence in the previous ten years, even though not actually sentenced to prison. Excluded would have been most of the two million adults who are convicted every year of minor charges, like obstruction of police, which are theoretically imprisonable. At the same time Whitelaw announced the appointment of ex-RUC commissioner Kenneth Newman to the Metropolitan Police and announced a review of Public Order law.

The first draft of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act was so draconian that even the *Daily Express* described it as 'tawdry, illiberal and ill-conceived'. It was thankfully abandoned due to the 1983 general election, but re-emerged, rewritten and only marginally less illiberal as the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE). As far as the police were concerned it was not the Act it used to be, even though it

transformed their powers. In particular they disliked the intention to form an 'independent' prosecution service, tape-recording of interviews in police stations and, especially, the defendant's continued right to silence.

Before examining the background to the present Royal Commission it is worth looking at the promised review of Public Order law which in reality proceeded in secret, without public scrutiny.

The paramilitary direction

In the wake of the 1981 uprisings, ACPO - a body totally without any constituted powers - decided to direct the development of public order policing. At its conference in September 1981 emergency sessions on public order were addressed by the RUC and the Royal Hong Kong Police. The choice was significant and contrary to the traditions of policing in Britain, misleadingly called 'policing by consent'. Both the RUC and the Hong Kong police employ the paramilitary policing methods held to be necessary to suppress communities hostile to colonial power.

The ACPO Working Groups formed as a result of the conference produced *The Public Order Manual of Tactical Options and Related Matters*, and provided a range of approved riot equipment. The existence and contents of the Manual were kept secret from both the public and Parliament, but approved by the Home Secretary. There was no agreement to form a Riot Squad, and in fact Scarman had argued firmly against such a move, but a Riot Squad was effectively formed.

The new colonial policing tactics were unveiled at Orgreave on 18 June 1984 during the miners' strike - the striking miners and their supporters were 'the enemy within', just as susceptible to paramilitary policing as the 'enemy without' which populates Britain's colonies. It was during the Orgreave riot trial in 1985 that the existence of the Manual first became public and only then that a censored section of the Manual appeared in the House of Commons library. Its contents are still regarded as secret. This totally unofficial, secret document, produced by a totally unaccountable body of police, now governs public order policing tactics in Britain. It also forms, with the lessons learned in the miners' strike, the background to the provisions of the Public Order Act 1986 which gives police wide-ranging powers to curtail and prevent political demonstrations and the activities of strikers.

Its consequences were seen during the Poll Tax demonstration in Trafalgar Square in 1990. Scarman's recommendation that it would be a tragedy if changes in public order policing distanced the police further from the public, echo from the dustbin of history: Dixon is now Darth Vader.

From Adversarial to Inquisitorial - the search for 'truth'

With sections of the British public now officially defined as the 'enemy within' it only remained for the police to rid themselves of the protections afforded by PACE, and in particular the right to silence. In 1988 Douglas Hurd as Home Secretary began the process by limiting the right in the North of Ireland, with the promise that this would be extended to Britain. His path was blocked, however, by a new series of policing scandals which extended far beyond anything previously exposed.

The successful appeal of the Guildford 4 in 1989 forced the setting up of the May Inquiry. The release of the Birmingham 6 at the beginning of 1991 drove home the point that what was involved here was not only police corruption but also the gross failure of the Appeals system. This was closely followed by the release of Judith Ward, the Tottenham Three's successful appeal and the revelations of the activities of the West Midlands Serious Crime Squad. These last two were in some respects the most significant for the police. With regard to the Guildford and Birmingham cases they argued that such miscarriages of justice could not happen now. But at Broadwater Farm in 1985 a trial run of PACE was in operation which did not prevent the police holding suspects incommunicado for days and denying access to solicitors. With the help of a press witch-hunt the three were convicted largely on the basis of uncorroborated, corrupt confession evidence. Many of the West Midlands cases took place after PACE came into operation.

This has not prevented the police from lobbying to influence the present Royal Commission to extend their powers. The style is different from McNee's crude lobbying, but its import is no different. We now have Darth Vader assuming the mask of Dixon. At an International Police Conference in London in October this year, Sir John Woodcock, Chief Inspector of police, and Sir Peter Imbert, Metropolitan Commissioner, admitted in unison that the police have been 'bending the

rules', but reform is now at hand in the shape of the Met's Plus Programme and a new Code of Ethics. Echoing McNee's evidence to the 1981 Royal Commission, Woodcock argued: 'Among police officers there is a widespread mistrust of the mechanisms of the judicial system which are seen as unnecessarily favouring the accused at the expense of the rights of the victim.' If we can't do it by breaking the rules, the argument goes, then you must make it easier for us to do it legally.

Sir Peter Imbert was ready with a shopping list of reforms: plea bargaining, pre-trial reviews, compulsory disclosure of defence evidence and restrictions to the right to silence. Oh yes, and of course, restrictions on the right to jury trial 'because it is being cynically abused to delay trials'. There is nothing in this list which addresses the corrupt police practices or the failures of the trial system which led to the brutal convictions of innocent men and women. The police would argue that they are reforming themselves voluntarily. Sir Peter has even removed the word 'Force' from the Metropolitan title and replaced it with the word 'Service'.

At the centre of this argument is that the adversarial system of trials is at fault. What we need is a search for the truth. This argument has become fashionable in the post-Guildford/Birmingham era and has been adopted even by liberal lawyers. It is a system which is widespread in Europe and is the basis of the Scottish legal system. Theoretically at least, police investigations of a crime are under the control of an independent 'magistrate' who supervises the investigation, collects all the evidence and presents a report to the court. What makes it so attractive to the police - provided of course that they become the 'independent' magistrates and police rolled into one - is that trials are quick and there is no right of silence for the accused. Research, however, shows that the inquisitorial system (at its worst the Star Chamber) is as riven with holes as the adversarial system. The 'independent' magistrate, who works with the police all the time, becomes a rubber stamp for police action. It is probably the case that there are just as many miscarriages, but with the added advantage for the police and judiciary that they are impossible to uncover. Without the right to silence there will be more confession evidence from suspects at their most vulnerable in police custody.

Darth Vader dressed as Dixon now proclaims that he has an overwhelming desire to protect the victims of crime. If this were true then the colossal number of domestic burglaries, incidents of domestic and sexual assault, racist attacks etc, which primarily afflict working class communities, would have been much higher police priorities than they actually are. In reality the police, whatever their guise, are neither more nor less than they have always been: a special body of armed men and women intent on repressing the working class in the interests of the state and the ruling class. As one contemporary remarked on the establishment of the Metropolitan Police in 1829: 'the latent object appears to have been that of placing at the disposal of the Home Secretary a body of well trained, disciplined and armed men, competent to intimidate the public and to keep down the rising spirit of the population.'

What marks this Royal Commission is the lack of debate about the alternatives and a consensus that a vague 'search for the truth' will be a panacea for all the ills of 1990s criminal justice. Truth, however, is not objective. In the 1970s the state needed convicted Irish people, so the police obliged. In the miners' strike the police were nothing other than the force used to break the strike in the interests of the British state. At Tottenham they branded as criminal and used terror against a community which was justifiably enraged at the death of a black woman. They will continue to use force to suppress black people, political demonstrators, strikers, the Irish, the poor and anyone who supports them. ■

Most Royal Commissions and special inquiries are remarkable only for the length of their deliberations and the speed with which the eventual proposals are dustbinned. This is not, however, the history of Royal Commissions concerning the police and criminal justice. Both the Royal Commission on the Police 1962 and the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure 1981 were accompanied by vigorous lobbying, in public and behind closed doors, and led to subsequent legislation - the Police Act 1964 and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE). If this past legislation is anything to go by we have much to fear for the future.

Ironically, both the previous Royal Commissions were triggered, like the present one, by policing scandals which were forgotten long before the recommendations were put on paper.

Reforming the police - 1962

In the late 1950s, disciplinary legal proceedings alleged corruption by the Chief Constables of Cardiganshire, Brighton and Worcester. Together with fierce disputes between Chief Constables and their local Watch Committees (to which they were accountable), and the arrest of actor Brian Rix in Whitehall, these led to the 1962 Royal Commission. The Commission itself deliberated against a background of further evidence of corruption including planting false evidence, the use of a rhino whip in Sheffield and repressive policing of political demonstrations. The outcome was less than progressive.

As a result the number of constabularies was reduced, but the overall effect was to put more control in the hands of central government in the shape of the Home Secretary and to lessen local accountability. Local police committees are restricted to issues of efficiency, but with important aspects of the budget under central government control. This was to become a major issue in the 1980s when local police committees tried to influence the purchase of plastic bullets and high-tech surveillance equipment, only to find that these were supplied by central government and totally outside their control. Chief Constables like Oxford in Liverpool and Anderton in Greater Manchester engaged in bitter disputes with their police committees following the inner city uprisings of the early and mid 1980s.

The establishment of 'Unit Beat' policing transformed the image of the police; as one commentator wrote: 'The "British Bobby" was recast as the tough, dashing, formidable (but still brave and honest) "Crime Buster".' This was Dixon transformed into Barlow and The Sweeney with all the ramifications of flashing blue lights and fire brigade policing.

Reforming Criminal Procedure - 1981

The consequences were still at issue when the Royal Commission on Criminal Procedure presented its proposals in 1981. The Commission was triggered by the 1977 Fisher Report on the Confait case where three juveniles were wrongly convicted of murder on the basis of confession evidence extracted in breach of the Judges Rules (which governed the treatment of suspects). This was soon forgotten as the Metropolitan Police Commissioner McNee and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) began a fierce lobbying campaign to ensure that the outcome would be enhanced police powers, not increased accountability or rights for suspects in custody. The issue of police corruption was explicable, said McNee, in his evidence to the Commission: 'Many police officers have, early in their careers, learned to use methods bordering on trickery and stealth in their investigations because they were deprived of proper powers by the legislature.' When the Commission delivered its proposals, which claimed to be a balance between increased police powers and protection for suspects, a fierce debate raged. To what

Privatisation and the POA

Geoff Coggan's article 'Taking on the POA' (FRFI 109) has prompted several replies from prisoners. Here we publish two: the first, by JOHN BOWDEN, examines the nature of the POA. The second, from STEPHEN WINDSOR who has spent eight years in Scottish gaols, makes out a case in favour of privatisation.

'A fascistic and anti-working class union'

Geoff Coggan raised some important questions concerning the position of the left vis-a-vis the organised prison officers' movement at a time when preparations for the privatisation of prisons clearly include a deliberate policy of undermining and ultimately breaking the unionisation of prison staff, writes JOHN BOWDEN

Suggesting that the left encounters a dilemma in whether or not to politically support and defend the Prison Officers Association, Geoff Coggan himself makes the false assumption that despite its 'unintelligent' and reactionary leadership, the POA still nevertheless possesses the potential as part of the working class labour movement to assume a progressive role in the reform of prisons. Such an assumption is contradicted by the role and history of the POA and its membership as an intrinsic and indispensable element in the oppression and brutalisation of prisoners. Far from being 'workers in uniform', prison officers and their representatives are by their very function part and parcel of the whole apparatus of social control and repression and possess neither the inclination nor independence from the system to be anything other than well-rewarded and willing helpers in the oppression of capitalist society's most marginalised and dispossessed. In the social and political struggle against state power and repression, prison officers, like the police and army, represent conscious front-line troops in the defence of that power, and the

military-type organisation and mentality of prison officers as a group confirms their function as very blunt instruments in the armoury of state power and violence. Is it reasonable to suggest that a group of people so imbued with a right wing mentality and a functional dependence on state repression can ever play anything other than a reactionary role in the struggle for or against prisoners' rights?

It is to the eternal disgrace of the TUC bureaucracy that such a fascistic and anti-working class organisation like the POA whose members have locked up and brutalised trade unionists and political prisoners, should ever have been accepted as an affiliate. One need only read Des Warren's account* of his imprisonment following the building workers' strike in 1972 to discover how prison staff and POA members operate as just another arm of the state in attacking trade unionists engaged in struggle. The POA and its membership have lived well on the wages of repression and no-one should pay much heed to the progressive sounding noises of such an organisation following the introduction of the new



'Fresh Start' working contracts - an attempt by the Home Office and government to organisationally disempower a monster that it had long nurtured and nourished for its own ends.

The issue is not whether the POA and prison officers generally can ever play a progressive role in the reform of prisons, but rather how should the left support and assist prisoners themselves in furthering their rights and by doing so challenge the very existence of the prison system as an instrument of social control and repression.

Geoff Coggan is clearly right in his view that the injustice and maltreatment suffered by prisoners is a structural phenomenon and not exclusively the fault of prison officers, POA members or otherwise, but this is surely all the more reason to adopt a radical/revolutionary perspective on

the prisoner struggle as opposed to a liberal/reformist one when seeking to formulate strategies of change.

Prisons are by their very nature coercive and oppressive institutions, intrinsically designed to disempower and destroy the resistance of those confined within them and so any discussion of 'reform' is largely meaningless and futile. Prisons, whether controlled and operated by the state or private companies, are weapons utilised by the powerful to keep the powerless in check and maintain an economic and social status quo beneficial to the former.

Geoff Coggan rightly points out that a docile POA, deprived of its ability and power to provoke prisoners into rebellion, might result in a largely acquiescent and pacified prison population; and then himself calls for the perpetration of 'good' prisons like Blantyre House and the Barlinnie Special Unit whose regimes are designed exactly for that purpose. Prisons, 'good' or bad, can have no 'positive emphasis' beyond controlling and disciplining prisoners, and in fact the so-called 'good' prison regimes are far more sinister in terms of the way that they seduce and brainwash prisoners into conformity. Living in a velvet-lined coffin is essentially no different from confinement in an obvious hate-factory like Wandsworth or Winson Green - either way one is controlled and imprisoned against one's will.

I would suggest that Geoff Coggan shifts his terms of reference when discussing how prisoners' rights might be extended, from a rather unrealistic and counter-productive paradigm of 'improved' prisons and 'caring' prison officers, to one that situates the struggle of prisoners clearly in the context of revolutionary class struggle and anti-capitalist politics.

* The key to my cell. New Park Publications.

were set and adhered to. If the company failed to meet these standards they would be heavily fined or the managers in charge even gaoled. Now there is a novel idea!

The POA and other self-interested parties will holler against any form of privatisation, rolling out their tongue-in-cheek platitudes about rehabilitation and prisoners' welfare. These people have no interest in prisoners apart from what can be financially extracted from them. They are against privatisation only because they know that profit-orientated companies will de-rail the prison gravy train that so many have enjoyed for so long and no more will they be able to invent situations out of thin air to milk more money from the tax-payer.

During my time in Shotts, the once central jewel in the crown of Scotland's penal system, I was refused exercise for 13 months. The only time I left my cell was for a shower and a brief walk up and down a 30-foot corridor. I had not incurred any disciplinary punishments to merit such treatment. The longest period I was refused food was seven days: no food, no water. We were locked up under the pretext of a 'state of emergency' following a minor disturbance.

Another POA trick is to threaten to refuse to take any more prisoners

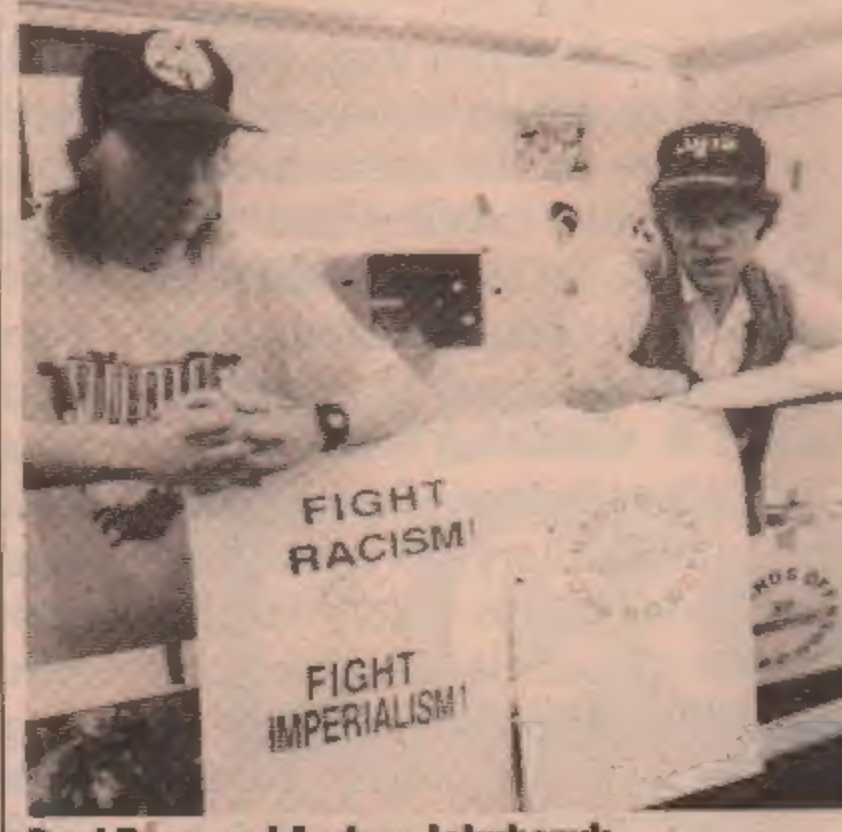
because of purported concern at overcrowding, something that never bothered them in the past when conditions were far worse than they are today with prisoners sleeping in the gymnasium and numbers touching 2,000. The aim of the POA, in my opinion, is to force the government to capitulate over the Fresh Start scheme which since introduction has killed large amounts of cash overtime payments warders used to enjoy, as opposed to the new system (still open to large scale abuse) which gives them time off in lieu of cash. It would come as no surprise if the POA demand extra cash payments when prison numbers go above a certain level. If the government agrees to such a demand the warders won't complain if prisoners are held ten to a cell and we will see no more crocodile tears about overcrowding.

In America prisoners benefit greatly from private companies investing in training and employing prisoners with guarantee of employment upon release. Prisoners earn the minimum wage that a similar employee would earn on the outside with a fifth of his wage going to a victim support scheme; another fifth for his keep; another for his family and the rest is divided up between savings and a weekly allowance for the prisoner in question.

INSIDE NEWS

SPECIAL UNIT PRISONERS VICTIMISED

On 13 October Paul Ross and Andrzy Jakubczyk were moved out of Hull Special Unit. 'Jacko' spent 28 days on lay-down at Walton before being moved to Garth where he is being held in segregation. In both gaols deliberate rumours have been spread that he is a sex-offender (which is not true) in an attempt to provoke violence against him. Paul spent his lay-down period at Armley and is now back at Hull but has been told that he has been deselected for the Special Unit and will be moving shortly. The incident which led to their removal is undoubtedly just an excuse to get the pair out of the Special Unit where they have, over the past year, taken full advantage of the facilities offered to produce literature and artwork which was innovative and creative as the Unit's staff and management would wish, but confronted the prison system itself in a way they very obviously did not wish! (See FRFI 105/6/7 for details.)



Paul Ross and Andrzy Jakubczyk

JOHN BOWDEN

To the rage and embarrassment of Maidstone prison and the Home Office, John escaped from custody on Monday 16 November while in London on a special visit to his sick father. John was still awaiting a judgement in his case for assault against prison officers at Winson Green (see FRFI 108), a judgement which the court appeared reluctant to give. The RCG has known John for nine years, since the 1983 siege at Parkhurst and he has been a regular and outstanding contributor to the 'Prisoners' Fightback' page (see article above). His next contribution should be extremely interesting!

HORRIFIC DEATH IN WINSON GREEN

The brutality of the regime at Winson Green which John highlighted in his case is shown even more graphically in the death of John Ryan. Ryan died in 1987 of thirst in a hospital wing cell where the temperature measured 82 degrees Fahrenheit. His family are now suing the Home Office for neglect. The details of Ryan's last days during which he was reduced to drinking his own urine and diagnosed by a prison doctor not as dehydrated but as psychotic were revealed in the High Court. This flagrant abuse of human rights has caused almost no public outcry in 'civilised' Britain. It is outrageous! Winson Green should be closed immediately.

Nicki Jameson

POWs' birthdays

Hugh Doherty 33836, HMP Albany, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 5RS, 7 December
Noel Gibson 879225, HMP Long Lartin, South Littleton, Evesham, Worcs, WR11 5TZ, 11 December
Gerard McDonnell B75882, HMP Whitmoor, Longhill Road, March, Cambs, PE15 0PR, 19 December
Natalino Vella B71644, HMP Albany, 29 December
Liam McCotter LB83694, HMP Whitmoor, 2 January

Privatisation: why not?

The best news prisoners have heard for a long time was Douglas Hurd's announcement on 1 March 1989 to permit private companies to build and run prisons, writes STEPHEN WINDSOR

Predictably Mr Hurd's plans have come under fire from Roy Hattersley and penal reform groups such as the Howard League who argue such a move is 'morally indefensible'. In my view private prisons are easier to defend morally than what now exists as an excuse for a modern prison system.

Let us examine briefly the situation at one of Britain's untried penal wings, Barlinnie. Prisoners are allowed one 15-minute visit each day, Monday to Saturday. They are given exercise roughly once every three days in a squalid little yard where you literally have to dodge the excrement jettisoned from cell windows by prisoners who are denied access to toilets on a regular basis at the whim of prison staff. The reason exercise is so infrequent is 'owing to the warders' ulterior motives in only allowing a certain ratio of prisoners to warders

out of doors at any one time. This is designed to foment anger and unrest which in turn serves to justify the constant calls for more staff. On top of this, prisoners are locked up often three to a cell, being let out only to empty their pots and to wash when warders can find the time.

How can Labour opposition defend the present penal system? Our penal system is rotten from the top right down to the bottom with few exceptions. At least with private companies running prisons the POA would be neutralised, if not abolished, a prerequisite for bringing prisons into the 20th century.

I full well realise that there could be room in a private prison system for certain abuses, however these abuses are already widespread in the present system. With privatisation should go a government inspectorate that would make sure certain standards

Prisoners fightback



STRANGeways

Second trial opens

The second Strangeways riot trial opened at Manchester on 5 October. Twelve men deny charges of conspiring to riot, commit GBH and cause criminal damage. ERIC ALLISON reports:

Unlike the first riot trial, armed police are not in evidence but the 12 are in the same bullet-proof dock constructed for 'Strangeways One' and relatives and friends of the accused – and members of the public – are subjected to screening and searching before being allowed into the public gallery. As in the first trial, this farce is solely for the benefit of persuading the jury that they are dealing with a dangerous and organised group.

By day 30 of the trial some 50 (out of 226) witnesses had given evidence. The main feature of contention to date has been the testimony of the screws who were on duty during the riot. In virtually all cases evidence given in court by these men bears little or no relation to the statements they made following the disturbance – both in debriefing written form to the Home Office and in their initial statements to police. Officers who at that time (April/May 1990) were unable to identify individuals and their actions are now perfectly certain that such

and such a man, on trial, committed such and such offences. The defence are having something of a field day in respect of these sudden (two and a half years after the event) recollections and it has been particularly pleasing to see witnesses positively squirming under cross-examination. (They are of course more used to giving evidence in prison adjudications – where the odds are stacked massively in their favour and where their words are usually taken as gospel.)

I would ask more people (especially ex-prisoners) to come along and show their support and solidarity with these men. If you can't attend, write to the 12 (c/o Central Detention Centre, Manchester Crown Court, Manchester, M60). They may be on their own in the dock but their fight is our fight and we should let them know it.

The 12 on trial are:

Andrew Nelson – already acquitted once in the first Strangeways murder and riot trial on

almost identical charges.

Alan Lord – also his second trial; Alan was one of the last men off the roof in the protest and became even more famous when he escaped from police custody while his guards watched the World Cup on TV!

Darren Jones – one of the final seven on the prison roof
John Murray – another of the final seven, John is being held at Armley at weekends during the trial where his relatives are very concerned at his treatment by ex-Strangeways staff

Barry Morton

Mark Azerpardi

David Bowen

Anthony Bush is being held at Full Sutton dispersal prison where he is the only remand prisoner

Kevin Gee

Nathan Gaynor

Mark Williams – was one of the final seven and has spent the two years since the uprising in the notorious Ashworth secure hospital

Glyn Williams – also one of the final seven. ■

WEST MIDLANDS SERIOUS CRIME SQUAD GUILTY AGAIN

Christine Sawbridge, serving a life sentence in Drake Hall, Stafford, is seeking support in her campaign for justice. She was convicted of murder in 1984 when only 16-years-old. Having been present at the scene of the crime, she was convicted solely on the basis of her male co-defendant's statement, and despite the complete lack of support for the prosecution's claim that the motive was robbery.

The investigation was carried out by the infamous West Midlands Serious Crime Squad (see *FRFI* 104) who, true to form, altered basic facts about the case such as the time the events took place, in order to secure her conviction.

Christine's case has been presented by Liberty to the Home Secretary, along with over 100 other miscarriages of justice. In order to increase the pressure, *FRFI* urges you to write in support of Christine to Kenneth Clarke, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1.

Andrew Pacey

Free the Cardiff 3!

On 7 December the Court of Appeal will hear the appeals of the Cardiff 3 who will by then be in their fifth year in prison for a murder they did not commit. In November 1990 Yusef Abdullahi, Tony Paris and Steve Miller were wrongly convicted of murdering Lynette White.

The Cardiff 3 are cautiously optimistic about the appeal hearing; they know they have a good case but are aware of the lengths to which the legal establishment will go to avoid the release of innocent people. Yusef Abdullahi recalls being racially abused at the trial: 'They called us black monkeys and said we should be kept in cages.' However, Tony Paris maintains that the racial angle should not be overstated: 'We are innocent. We should be released whether the case against us was racist or not.'

A host of new evidence will show these convictions to be ridiculous but will leave unanswered many questions about the South Wales Police inquiry into the murder. A white man, in tears, with blood on him, was witnessed near the scene and a photo-fit issued and shown on the BBC 'Crimewatch UK' programme. Why then, nine

months later, did the police arrest eight men, seven of them black? Blood stains, 148 fingerprints and a palm-print were found at the scene but none were linked to any of the men. In fact, no forensic evidence was ever produced. The three men charged had strong alibi witnesses, some of whose statements were withheld from the defence at the trial.

The setting of the appeal date for the Cardiff 3 does not mark an end to the fight for justice either for them or for other framed prisoners. It is essential to keep up the pressure for the appeals of the Cardiff 3, the M25 3 (see *Letters page*), Eddie Browning and more and to ensure that Graham Melvin, the corrupt detective who framed Winston Silcott and the policemen on trial for framing the Guildford 4 are not let out the back door.

Chas Newkey-Burden

REVIEWS

A climate of fear

A Climate of Fear: The murder of PC Blakelock and the case of the Tottenham Three. David Rose, Bloomsbury, 1992, £6.99 pb.

In the immediate wake of riots in Handsworth, the police shooting of Mrs Cherry Groce in Brixton, and the death of Mrs Cynthia Jarrett in Tottenham, Broadwater Farm estate became the scene of what has been described as the worst rioting ever in Britain. Its immediate result was the killing of a police officer. But in the months that followed a much worse crime was committed – not by 'rioters' but by the police, the press and the judicial system which systematically hounded and harassed an entire community, culminating in the imprisonment of the innocent.

For Sir Kenneth Newman, then Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Broadwater Farm was already a 'symbolic location'. It was already targeted for special treatment as what Newman described as a 'rookery' for the disaffected. Here the inhabitants, many of them black of course, could be treated as enemies of law and order. It was this designation which led to the police raid on Mrs Jarrett's house; which in turn directly led to her death. It was this designation which ensured that anger at a black woman's death became a battle between the community and the police.

But the police who raided Mrs Jarrett's house and their bosses were not dragged to court. Instead a whole community was put under siege by police who

were determined to engender fear. Houses were raided by armed police with sledge hammers; children were dragged from their beds at dawn. People simply disappeared into any one of 14 police stations without trace. The press bayed for revenge.

Young men, many of them illiterate, disadvantaged and highly susceptible to police harassment under questioning, were arrested, kept for long periods in solitary confinement, denied legal representation, and forced to make false confessions. If they refused to give the police information, then their confessions and statements were written for them.

Out of a plethora of self-created, corrupt evidence the police charged six young men with murder. Amongst them was the man the police were determined to convict – Winston Silcott. Portrayed in the press as a monster, Winston did not stand a chance. The *Sun* published his picture, taken by a police photographer and leaked to the press, on the front page. The press, the police, the legal establishment had determined his guilt in advance.

There was plenty of evidence that the whole of the murder inquiry was corrupted by the actions of the police. Solicitors who attempted to defend the community had all the evidence; an independent inquiry report led by Lord Gifford con-

tained all the details of the terror unleashed by the police. One of the six on trial for murder, a juvenile, had his case dismissed because of the treatment he received.

But a huge conspiracy of silence ensured that the real criminals were able to conduct the prosecution; present their false evidence as 'the truth', and eventually imprison three innocent men for life.

Winston Silcott, Engin Rahip and Mark Braithwaite were not the only victims. More than three hundred were arrested, many were degraded and tortured by any definition. Those convicted received harsh penalties in line with what the British judiciary chooses to call 'the gravity of their crimes'.

It is a great tribute that this ravaged community, and in particular the shocked families of the convicted, continued an unrelenting campaign against all the odds to free their innocent sons. On 25 November 1991, the three won their appeals and now the police officer in charge of the 'investigation', DC Melvin, faces charges for perverting the course of justice.

David Rose's book describes the events which led to the imprisonment of three innocent men and their subsequent successful appeals. As Rose reveals, there is still unfinished business. At the heart of the affair lies the racism of the British criminal justice system, from the police, to the press, to the courts, which ensured that the innocent were always perceived as guilty.

And Winston Silcott is still serving life imprisonment for a murder he did not commit, where the conduct of the trial was poisoned by the Blakelock charges. Police from the Blakelock investigation attended the court and special security for the jury was ordered. They were left in no doubt that here was a specially dangerous man. His family and supporters are still fighting for his release.

David Rose is to be congratulated for putting together all the material which Winston describes as his favourite book.

Carol Brickley



Detective Chief Superintendent Graham Melvin

Violent life, violent death



Born to die in Medellin
Alonso Salazar, Latin America Bureau 1992, pp129, £5.99

The cover figure is posed in imitation of Brando draped over the Harley in *The Wild One*: contempt as beauty, violence as style. These are the stories of people at the end of the world, in a bright shiny nightmare from which even William Burroughs' doped-up heroes would jolt in terror. The youth gangs and contract killers of Colombia's second city.

'We'd already had the pay-off,

so as the saying goes: "the dead to their graves, the living to the dance"; 'It's hard to find a boyfriend these days, there aren't many men left'; 'We learn a lot from films. We get videos of people like Chuck Norris, Black Cobra, or Stallone and watch how they handle their weapons, how they get away'; 'When someone has killed say twenty people, they won't take anything from anybody. Killing... makes them happy'; 'There's lots of 18-year-old kids round here who've got luxury flats...'; 'They want to be famous killers, they want people to go down on their knees to them'; 'a salsa song popular in the area: "Go on, kill, God will forgive you"'; 'In Medellin, Mother's Day is the most violent day of all.' Glimpses into the inferno recorded in interviews by the Colombian academic and journalist Salazar.

Wherever capitalism has ventured it has arrived with violence and crime. From the slaving pirates to the 'Wild West', to today's organised crime in Rus-

sia, its entrepreneurs begin with cash and gun. In Colombia the process has been condensed and magnified with the explosion of the cocaine trade since 1974. Colombia contains the continent's main refineries and is its chief distribution point for the North American and European markets. Consequently it has received the bulk of the income that has not been deposited in the western banks. The rise of drug trafficking as the principal means of accumulation for the Latin American bourgeoisie propelled the traffickers into a struggle for power. They recruited the youth of the shanty towns and filtered fractions of their drug fortunes down, fueling the inferno.

In the interviews you see the grotesque work of money, how it plays on the individualism and clannishness typical of former peasants. Moving in the background is the failure of the left to put down roots, hold them and organise these vast tattered armies. This is a process that has not finished. The shanty towns will be a field of contention for revolutionaries in the years ahead. This book does not explain the motion of Colombian society, but it is a vivid indictment of cocaine capitalism.

Trevor Rayne

Labour: a party fit for imperialism

Labour and British Imperialism since 1951
Video: *The enemy within*
Last in the current series of discussions based on the RCG's book of the same title and *The People's Flag* videos series.
Monday 30 November, 7.30pm
Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq, WC1 (nearest tube: Holborn) £1/50p

RCG Communist Forum

South African Revolution in the balance
Speaker: Carol Brickley, FRFI Editorial Board and Convenor, City AA
Sunday 6 December, 2pm,
Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq WC1 (nearest tube Holborn) £1/50p

Dundee RCG Supporters' Group

7.30pm Wednesday 9 December
Kandahar House, Meadows
Dundee

Miners' Support Group, Dundee

For information about the activities of the MSG and its newsletter *Turning Point*, write to: Miners' Support Group, Dundee, PO Box 9, Dundee East, Dundee DD4 9YA

For details of any of the above meetings tel: 071 837 1688

City AA Christmas Social

Thursday 17 December, 8pm
The Locomotive, Jamestown Road, London NW1 (nearest tube: Camden Town)
Tel: 071 837 6050 for details

RCG Christmas Cabaret

Sunday 13 December 7.30pm
SOLS ARMS (behind Capital Radio, Euston Tower)
tubes: Warren Street/Euston Sq
Buses: 134, 27, 29, 24
Azanian, Turkish, Irish
Freedom songs • Political theatre • Poetry
Tickets: £5/£3 in advance, £6/£4 on the door

BOOKS FOR A REVOLUTIONARY CHRISTMAS

Forget crowded shopping streets, tinsel, glitter and overpriced useless gifts. Buy something really interesting and useful for your friends, colleagues and comrades this year!

SPECIAL OFFER!

LABOUR: A PARTY FIT FOR IMPERIALISM

BY ROBERT CLOUGH
Price £4.95 + 75p p&tp 192pp

Labour never has been and never can be a party of the whole working class. It has never defended the poor and has always espoused the same Imperialist foreign policies as the Tory Party.

THE LEGACY OF THE BOLSHEVIK REVOLUTION

EDITED BY EDDIE ABRAHAMS
Price £4.50 + 60p p&tp 144pp

This book brings together articles which examine the legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution from a Marxist standpoint.

and new pamphlet

SOUTH AFRICAN REVOLUTION IN THE BALANCE

COMMUNIST ANALYSIS OF THE AZANIAN LIBERATION STRUGGLE
Price £2 + 40p p&tp 40pp

All 3 for £10 including postage and packing!

I would like to take up the £10 special offer ☐

Name _____

Address _____

Tel: _____

Make cheques payable to Larkin Publications and return to BCM 5909, London WC1N 3XX

LETTERS Write to FRFI BCM Box 5909, London, WC1N 3XX

Organising the unemployed in Dundee

People should read Robert Clough's book on communists and the unemployed struggles of the 1920s and 1930s. The situation then and now, is basically the same in that communists must motivate a mass movement. That is what we have started to do with the Dundee Miners' Support Group in the last few weeks. The unemployed are totally ignored by the Labour Party and trade unions. They are excluded from these organisations because there is no benefit - no subscriptions. The unemployed are regarded as an 'underclass', which is just a form of abuse. Unemployment will always be with the working class under capitalism.

It is assumed that mass unemployment only came in the late 1920s. But as early as 1922, there were demonstrations of men, women and children. People had seen their brothers and fathers go off to the trenches and not return, they had seen thousands of disabled return from the war to a life of poverty. The ex-soldiers had to assemble at the unemployment office to get their money. They were lorded over by



the bailiffs. One called Bobby Allen was notorious: he would disqualify men from benefit if they were smoking, or if he thought their clothes were too smart. Anger broke out and whole days of rioting took place - the unemployed smashed the Provost's windows and marched in the petit bourgeois districts. On the demonstrations they sang the *Internationale*, *The Red Flag* and *The Soldier's Song*. There were lots of Irish workers in Lochee. It was at the time of the Irish civil

war. The Irish in Dundee had very vivid accounts coming from their own relatives of the murderous activities of the British 'black and tans'.

The political situation today is not identical, it is worse in some ways. People have not been through the appalling experiences of war, and television is now the valium of the masses. Communists need to make the masses aware of political situations; we are talking about political education. Our

experience of standing outside the unemployed office is that people's dignity has been stripped away from them. To organise with them is going to be a real struggle. Having said that, as people sign the petition for an unemployed workers' movement and for an unemployed centre, they are beginning to get back some of their dignity.

ANDY DUNCAN
MIKE TAYLOR
Dundee

'The origins of Gorbachev's counter-revolution'

Your editorial in *FRFI* 107 and the article 'The origins of Gorbachev's counter-revolution' raise some questions. In your editorial you call for reviving the communist movement internationally, and then give five trends which you believe can contribute to that process. One of the 'trends' you exclude is the anti-Soviet Marxist parties, as you say they participated with the imperialists in attacking the socialist regimes on the grounds that such regimes were 'state-capitalist' or 'social imperialism'. However surely you must realise that their (ie the anti-Soviet Marxists') reasons for opposing the USSR was not to join with the imperialists in attacking what you term the socialist states - but because they believed the Soviet Union's socialism had been destroyed with the seizure of power by Nikita Khrushchev and his group in 1956 and the rapid restoration of capitalism. The Chinese Communist Party until 1976 regularly published material which they claimed showed how capitalism had been restored in the USSR and could be restored in the People's Republic of China...

The trends your editorial identifies as those on which an international communist movement could be revived would exclude the Peruvian Communist Party, known as Sendero Luminoso, and yet that party with its policy of protracted guerrilla war explicitly locates itself on the side of the CCP's anti-Soviet polemic of the 1960s, in support of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, and in their leader's interview in 1988 he was quite specific that the USSR was a social-imperialist state. Whilst the fact that the PCP's leaders say something doesn't in itself make it true, obviously the fact that in Peru, an organisation that has based itself on a very distinct ideological trend that has shaken Peruvian society and its state to the core, precipitated a presidential coup and led to considerable US military



involvement should perhaps call for an investigation into the underlying ideology of that trend. The criteria to use for judging whether a group or organisation is revolutionary is not what position they took on the August 1991 events in the USSR but how good they are at overthrowing reactionaries or at least successfully opposing them...

The question of the origin of 'Gorbachev's counter-revolution' also raises questions that Eddie

M25 Three appeal: right to reply

'Selective' or 'non disclosure' of prosecution evidence, due to 'public interest' immunity, or 'national security', strikes an unjust chord into the very heart of British democracy.

The James Bond cry of 'national security' is, I suggest, undemocratically abused to the advantage of both the judiciary and the executive, to the disadvantage of the citizen, and often leads to a total disregard for the rights of the individual!

Likewise, 'Public Interest Immunity' can often be used to protect a criminal from prosecution, on condition he implicates some other possible innocent party. Again, the defence do not have the full right

of reply. This is especially so when, as can be the case, their right to examine evidence in court is arbitrarily taken away from them, and even more so if professional conduct and loyalties prevent the defence council from hearing the very evidence initially collected against their client.

A defendant in a criminal case should have an automatic right of access to all evidence, with a right to reply, to either challenge or confirm, justify or explain: only then can a true picture of either innocence or guilt be portrayed.

My barristers have been gagged. WHY? I wish to know, for after all, it is my life that is at present balancing on the scales of justice!

RAPHAEL ROWE
HMP Gartree, Market Harborough,
Leicestershire LE16 7RP

Abrahams attempts to answer in his review of two recent publications on this topic. Eddie Abrahams refers to 'Most Maoists, uncritically defending Stalin's record' when in fact he probably means most Maoists in Europe - the majority of Maoists worldwide, principally in numerical terms in the PRC, were critical of Stalin's record as a reading of Volume 5 of Chairman Mao's Selected Works, ... will indicate. Furthermore, the actual building of socialism in the PRC until 1976, was critical of Stalin's record especially in regard to agriculture where a definite step-by-step process was initiated. Details can be found in 'Socialist Upsurge in China's Countryside' of the co-operative movement. As well the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was a very definite attempt to prevent the emergence of the technocratic, managerial-bureaucratic groups to a position of dominance within the party and state as had happened in the USSR without resorting to wholesale purges.

That being said, nevertheless Eddie Abrahams does raise the fundamental question of building socialism, which is to maintain the 'socialist road' and to 'date' when the counter-revolution triumphed in the USSR. This is where the issue of Stalin arises or

precisely the history of the international communist movement for almost 30 years. Throughout these 30 years for the immense majority of those regarding themselves as communists Stalin was the leader of the world revolution, the CPSU (B) the leading party and, until 1943, the Comintern the revolutionaries' international. It is in this context that I think this is an overstatement: 'By the late 1920s the CPSU had already been seriously infected with reactionary and anti-democratic elements.' The question arises was such a party able to industrialise the USSR, defeat Nazi Germany and its allies, liberate eastern Europe and rebuild the Soviet Union post-1945? Because somebody did these things and the CPSU (B) was in power in this period. Throughout this period as well millions of people joined communist parties throughout the world; much of the impetus being because of what they saw in the USSR as the future for their own societies.

It is gratifying that *FRFI* has decided to open such important debates and I for one hope that the debate is entered into by as many revolutionaries as possible.
ANTHONY BIDGOOD
Victoria, Australia

Squeezing the working class

More and more forms of economic compulsion are being used to force the working class to accept less.

The DSS is at the forefront of the big squeeze. As from April, single mothers claiming income support will have their benefits reduced if they fail to provide the name of the father of their children. Their benefit will be suspended until they provide that information. Women are already being pressurised to say how many times they had sex with the child's father, otherwise no benefit will be paid.

Another form of compulsion: in Edinburgh there is a 17-year-old woman working for £42 a week. She cannot afford to pay any rent. The DSS have told her that if she gives up the job she would be disqualified from any benefit for 6 months. There is no other job waiting for her. This is the choice before her - either sticking with £42 a week or facing complete poverty and homelessness.

KAREN TAYLOR
RORY BEATON
Dundee

CHOOSE THE RCG

If you believe that the treachery of the opportunist British Labour and trade union movement must be challenged, then there is no alternative - **Join the RCG!**

I would like to join/receive more information about the RCG

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

SUBSCRIBE to the best anti-imperialist newspaper in Britain FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Subscription rates:
● Britain (inc N. Ireland): £4.50 for 6 issues, £8 for 12 issues
● EC/Europe air printed paper rate: £6 for six issues, £11 for 12 issues
● EC/Europe air letter rate: £7 for 6 issues, £13 for 12 issues
● Africa, America, Middle East, South Asia air printed paper rate: £7.50 for 6 issues, £14 for 12 issues
● East Asia, Australasia, Pacific air printed paper rate: £8.50 for 6 issues, £16 for 12 issues
● Libraries and institutions: double individual rates

Make cheques/POs payable to Larkin Publications.

Add £5 for foreign currency cheques. Overseas rates given are for printed paper reduced rate and are unsealed. If you wish your mail to be sealed please let us know and we will inform you of the extra cost.

I wish to subscribe to *FRFI* beginning with issue _____

Name _____

Address _____

I enclose payment of £ _____ for _____ issues at _____ rate

Return this form to: *FRFI*, BCM Box 5909 London WC1N 3XX



TRANSPORT WORKERS DELAY ACTION

As we go to press the leaders of the RMT have called off the threatened all-out strike of London tube workers after last minute talks. There are no assurances over jobs, pay or conditions, except that there will be no compulsory redundancies.

London tube workers threatened an all-out strike from 24 November in the face of a major assault on their jobs, pay and conditions. Despite the dangerous understaffing of the London Underground, obvious to anyone who uses it, management are determined to cut staff by 5,000 leaving just 16,000. Just as with BR, it is workers and users who will be forced to pay the real costs of management greed and government underinvestment.

The London Underground Company Plan is a direct attack on the workforce. Not only are they hoping to make thousands redundant but they plan to cut costs in other ways. At least 30% of the workforce will have pay cuts imposed on them. For example, senior booking clerks will face a pay cut of almost £2,000. In addition, they will be forced to perform other duties previously not part of their contracts, such as platform duties. Workers will be forced to re-apply for their jobs under new job descriptions. Cleaning of stations and trains will be contracted out, no doubt to poorly paid contract workers. By such means LU plans to save £150 million a year.

To try to divide the workers LU has claimed that some workers, such as drivers, will get wage rises. In fact they will be forced to accept flexible working and expect to face wage cuts in the long term. To divide the travelling public from the workers, LU claims that the savings will be used to invest in better trains and stations. This is a lie – the government has just cut LU's investment budget by £200 million a year. Even if LU made savings, the service would continue to decline. The savings they are proposing will simply make matters worse in terms of safety and discomfort.

LU was in a determined mood, threatening to use scabs to run the trains and to take passengers free if booking halls were closed by strike action. But the workers too are determined and, as the wildcat strikes of 1989 showed, are well-organised. The main problem is the official union leadership who were as appalled by the independence of the workers in 1989 as the management. A Springtime of Discontent is in prospect.

Maxine Williams

IRAQGATE

Arms, lies and profits

'Bourgeois democracy ... always remains, and under capitalism is bound to remain, restricted, truncated, false and hypocritical, a paradise for the rich and a snare and deception for the exploited, for the poor.' (Lenin)

The Iraqgate affair – the public exposure of systematic lying, deception, hypocrisy and immorality by the Cabinet and government officials over arms sales to Iraq – offers a splendid insight into the methods of those who rule Britain. The British system of government is revealed to be no more than an institution for organising the affairs of powerful billionaires and multinationals. Contemptuous of ordinary people and terrified lest they discover the truth, it works tirelessly to pull the wool over the public eye (and even its less than watchful parliamentary representatives) while aiding and abetting profit-hungry industrialists and financiers to amass fortunes. EDDIE ABRAHAMS investigates the corruption, greed and lies behind Iraqgate.

The glow of £1bn suffices to illuminate every aspect of Iraqgate. Between 1987 and 1991 over 38 British companies, with British government support, made over £1bn from selling arms and armament technology to Iraq. Plesseys, Philips Scientific, BIMEC Industries, BSA Tools, Lear-Fan, Marconi Systems, Thorn EMI Radar, MTTA are but a few of the companies involved. Matrix Churchill, whose three directors – Paul Henderson, Peter Allen and Trevor Abraham – were to go to prison and trial in the now failed government cover-up, accounted for only 3 per cent of this trade.

Yet arms sales to Iraq were in breach of the government's own publicly announced policy. On 29 October 1985, in the middle of the Iran-Iraq war, Geoffrey Howe, then Foreign Secretary, said: 'The United Kingdom has been strictly impartial in the conflict between Iran and Iraq and has refused to allow the supply of lethal defence equipment to either side.'

Howe added that since 1984 the government had adopted a number of guidelines; among them was the following:

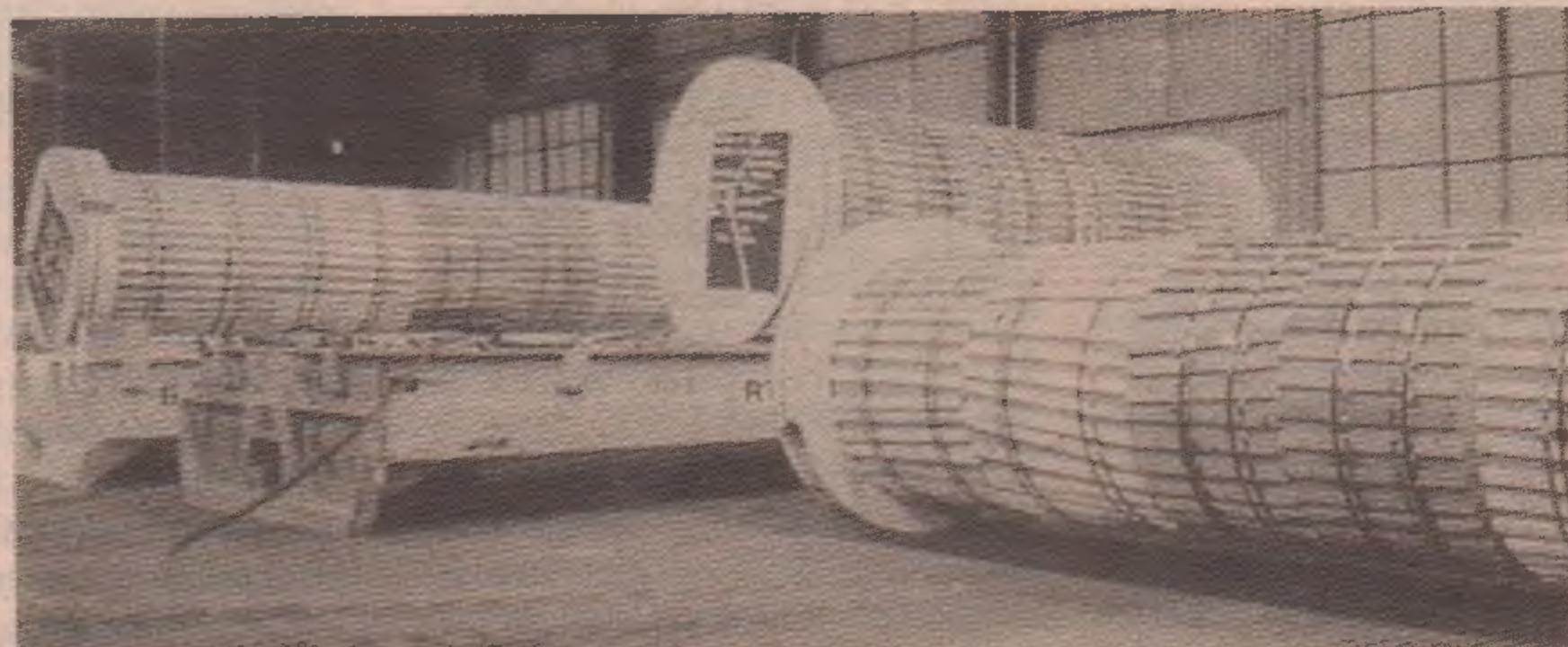
'We should not, in future, approve orders for any defence equipment which, in our view, would significantly enhance the capability of either side to prolong or exacerbate the conflict;

In line with this policy we should continue to scrutinise rigorously all applications for export licences for the supply of defence equipment to Iran and Iraq.'

This statement was in a written answer to a House of Commons question. Its only aim was to fob off those concerned that the slaughter of the Iran-Iraq war was being prolonged and encouraged by the profit-hungry British armaments manufacturers. In secret and behind the scenes, government departments continued to provide export licences and even offered export credit guarantees to those firms hoping to make their fortunes from the killing fields of Iraq, Iran and Kurdistan. Nothing – not the gassing and murder of 5,000 Kurds, the slaughter of millions in the Iran-Iraq war, let alone a mere parliamentary commitment, was to get in the way of earning a billion.

Its parliamentary proclamations apart, the real principles which underlay British government practice were expressed in an interview Alan Clark gave to the *Sunday Telegraph* in August 1992:

'I was minister for trade, so it was my job to maximise exports despite guidelines ... and it was clear to me that the interests of the West were well served by Iran and Iraq fighting each other, the longer the better.'



The British 'Supergun' which was intercepted before making its way to Iraq



The human cost of the weaponry supplied by Britain to Iraq

Quizzed about the use of British weapons for killing Kurds, Clark said on the BBC's *The Moral Maze* 'The Kurds don't vote for me'.

Clark was efficient at organising the systematic deception of parliament and the public. A machine tool maker was advised on how to apply for export licences:

'Mr Clark advised ... as follows: the intended use of the machines should be couched in such a manner as to emphasise the peaceful aspect to which they should be put.'

In 1989 a fierce clash developed between the Foreign Office – where John Major was Foreign Secretary – and the Department of Trade over licences for Matrix Churchill exports. William Waldegrave, then subordinate to Major, wrote to Trade Secretary Lord Trefgarne on 6 September 1989 stating: 'We know ... that contrary to the assurances of the manufacturers, its high technology machine tools have been shipped to the major Iraqi munitions establishments.'

Lord Trefgarne was not moved. He supported the export licence application remarking that the operation of ministerial guidelines had 'weakened to the point of extinction' since the August 1988 Iran-Iraq ceasefire. The licences were granted. Indeed they continued to be granted right up to 27 July 1990 – six days before the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In June 1990 Nicholas Ridley successfully rebutted challenges arguing that failure to go ahead with exports could cause Iraq to default on its £1bn British government guaranteed debt, with adverse consequences for the public sector borrowing requirement.

However in public the Government continued its lying. In 1989 Trade Minister Lord Trefgarne told the House of Lords: 'We do not sell arms to Iraq'. On 31 January 1991 John Major told Parliament that: '... for some considerable time we have not supplied arms to Iraq.' Then in November 1992 he claimed that: '... from 1985 until the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait the government operated under guidelines first set out by the then Foreign Secretary.'

To sustain its deceit, the government allowed Customs and Excise to prosecute three Matrix Churchill directors for breach of export controls. Cynical to the end, the government did not care that one of these directors – Paul Henderson – was a MI6 agent of 18 years standing. To torpedo the defendants in court, three Cabinet ministers – Michael Heseltine, Kenneth Baker and Malcolm Rifkind signed Public Interest Immunity Certificates denying them access to documents proving complicity in the Matrix Churchill exports.

But the whole bag of rotten lies was exposed when the trial judge having seen the documents and heard Alan Clark's evidence, dismissed the case.

Today John Major, while admitting that government guidelines had indeed been breached, claims to have known nothing of the business at the time! It is all apparently Alan Clark's fault. And papers to that effect have been sent to the DPP. Never mind that in 1988-89, four of Major's Cabinet colleagues – David Mellor, Tony Newton, William Waldegrave and John Wakeham – visited Baghdad. In September 1989, while Foreign Secretary, John Major was briefed for a meeting he had with his Iraqi counter-part Tariq Aziz. Furthermore



Iraqi soldiers with artillery shells during the Iran-Iraq war

and crucially, he was Foreign Secretary at the height of the inter-departmental dispute over the export licences to Iraq. Yet he claims not to have known about the affair. Those who wish to believe him will do so.

Whether or not Major knew, his position merely confirms the subordination of bourgeois parliamentary politics to the real needs of profit and the state. As Balzac aptly remarked:

'Any society based solely on the power of money should tremble at the prospect of the law's inability to curb the machinations of a system which aspires after success by permitting all possible means to be used in order to attain it.'

Humanitarian concerns, considerations of democracy, public accountability and parliamentary commitments have never stood in the way of multinationals seeking to make profits. Among these the arms trade is particularly lucrative. Of the top 20 British manufacturers, 11 are involved in the business, which employs 1 in 10 manufacturing workers. Exports, especially to pro-imperialist Third World dictators, constitute an enormous source of profits. In 1990 Britain's biggest arms company, British Aerospace, made 65 per cent of its sales abroad, with over 50 per cent to Third World countries.

Neither the Labour Party nor the press are prepared to make a scandal of these facts – they are too close to the interests of capital. British arms enable the Suharto regime in Indonesia to carry out genocide in Timor. British arms have sustained fascist and repressive regimes in Chile, in Argentina, in Saudi Arabia in Kenya, in Uganda, South Africa and elsewhere. But no scandals here. The profit is too great.

In Iraq, arms manufacturers have no further profit to make. So the British press, media and Labour Party liberally wax indignant over 'arms to dictator Saddam', over government 'deception' and dishonesty. With the deepening recession generating greater discontent in wider and wider sections of society, Iraqgate offers a factiogn of the bourgeoisie the opportunity of embarrassing the Government without damaging the profitability of British capitalism and its murder industry. But neither the press nor the Labour Party are prepared to make a public scandal of the arms trade itself, of the profit motive which leads to wars, to death, to destruction, to poverty.

How many other Iraqgates is the government hiding from us in relation to the NHS, education, the welfare state, transport, housing and foreign policy? The answer to such questions will only be wrested by popular force, by a mass movement not by inquiries set up by the government and state. ■